

WILL MSNBC DUMP THE LEFT? || PATTI SMITH'S ILLUMINATIONS

LESLIE SAVAN

JAMES LONGENBACH

THE Nation. 150

OCTOBER 26, 2015



The Secret to Sanders's Success

D.D. GUTTENPLAN



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Papal Buzzkill

Thank you, Katha Pollitt, for challenging the media lovefest for Pope Francis, and also for challenging the pass that even progressive journalists have given him and the Catholic Church [“The Pope’s Blind Spot,” Sept. 28/Oct. 5]. Have we forgotten that this pope leads an institution that excludes half of the world from its formal leadership? Or that this same institution is responsible for the death of a Hindu woman in an Irish-Catholic hospital because of its refusal, on religious grounds, to perform an emergency termination of her pregnancy, which would have saved her life?

Have we forgotten that this pope and his institution oppose condom use to prevent HIV/AIDS? That this pope and his institution are opposed not just to abortion but to virtually all forms of contraception (as well as sex education), even though hundreds of thousands of women die from risky pregnancies? That this pope and his institution have forced young girls raped by relatives to carry the resulting pregnancies to term, leading to childbirth by children, as recently happened in Colombia? That this pope decries poverty, but ignores the connection between poverty and fertility rates, fertility rates and overpopulation, overpopulation and climate change?

Yes, this pope is more liberal and personable than others, and he seems to care about poverty. But the current Saudi Arabian monarch is also a bit more liberal than previous leaders. So is Iran’s leadership. Yet we still feel obligated to critically evaluate their institutions and policies.

Pope Francis, for all his gentle ways and concerns about poverty, still represents a hierarchical, authoritarian, patriarchal, ideologically narrow, science-challenged, anti-democratic,

powerful, and powerfully rich institution—one convinced that its truth is the *only* truth!

CAROL C. MUKHOPADHYAY
SAN MATEO, CALIF.

Sister Act

Thank you for your articles about Pope Francis [Sept. 28/Oct. 5]; I appreciated all three. In “A Vision So Old It Looks New,” Nathan Schneider expertly tracks the Catholic Church’s tradition of egalitarian economics. However, two corrections must be made to his article—one perhaps minor, one very major.

The minor one: The pipeline in Kentucky that was put on hold in 2014 was to carry natural-gas liquids, not natural gas. These hazardous NGLs are extracted via the fracking of natural gas; their transportation has caused numerous well-documented accidents.

The major one: The article refers to the protest against the pipeline, which was slated to be developed across 200 miles of our state, as “the Sisters of Loretto campaign.” We in the Loretto community, both sisters and co-members, were indeed involved in the efforts to halt it. However, to label that work as our campaign is to create a very skewed picture of the efforts of a broad coalition.

A group from our motherhouse, where I live, joined a network of other organizations and individuals in opposing the pipeline. These included landowners, farmers, environmental groups, other religious communities, many county and state officials, volunteer attorneys, town council members, alarmed citizens, and those concerned about property rights, contaminated streams, and Kentucky’s fragile karst landscape.

Town-hall meetings, film showings, demonstrations, letters to various editors, op-ed pieces, attendance

letters@thenation.com

(continued on page 26)

How Many More Must Die?

In recent months, another wave of gun violence has swept across the United States. On October 1, in Roseburg, Oregon, a man with a history of mental illness and a small arsenal, legally acquired, opened fire at Umpqua Community College, killing nine people. In June, Dylann Roof laid siege to a black church

in Charleston, South Carolina, in the hopes of igniting a race war. He shouldn't have owned the weapons he used to kill nine parishioners, but a loophole in the federal background-check system allowed him to make the purchase. This was followed in late July by another spree shooting, this time inside a movie theater in Louisiana. In August, a disgruntled former employee of a Virginia television station murdered a reporter and a cameraman live on the air. As cable-news stations kept replaying the killings, the gunman posted on social media a soon-to-be-viral video of the murders, which he recorded with a cell phone held behind a Glock 19. All of this occurred on top of the grinding violence in America's inner cities, where the true cost of gun deaths are borne—primarily by black men, who are 15 times more likely to die from gun violence than white men.

Politicians cannot avoid this scourge. This is true in a literal sense: One of the Roseburg victims was a relative of Oregon Senator Jeff Merkley, while a staffer for New York Governor Andrew Cuomo was killed in Brooklyn by a stray bullet in September. Gun violence has also spiked in Washington, DC, mainly in the poor neighborhoods ringing the city, where the murder rate surpassed that of 2014 by early September.

But it's also true in a much more fundamental sense: There is a public-safety crisis that the political class has both the ability and the obligation to address. Studies have shown a direct correlation between tighter gun-control measures and fewer gun deaths, as President Obama noted in his frustration-laced speech following the Roseburg shooting. "When roads are unsafe, we fix them to reduce auto fatalities. We have seat-belt laws because we know it saves lives. So the notion that gun violence is somehow different...doesn't make sense," Obama said.

To that end, Democratic candidate Hillary Clin-

ton later unveiled some good proposals that can help the problem: mandating universal background checks, allowing gun manufacturers to be sued for selling dangerous products, and closing the background-check loophole. In a rational political system, those measures would pass—and would have done so long ago. A broad bipartisan majority of Americans, including gun owners, support them. And yet, every political observer knows that tougher gun-control laws will not be enacted anytime soon.

That's because our failure to properly address gun deaths is a symptom of a larger democratic crisis. The reason that the United States can't confront the clear and existential threat of climate change, or expand a safety net that is demonstrably shortchanging poor Americans, is the same reason that this country can't solve its gun problem: a rigged political

infrastructure that gives outsized power to wealthy corporate interests and the extremists who pander to them. A strong background-check bill actually received a majority of votes in the Senate following the Sandy Hook shootings in Newtown, Connecticut, but it failed to advance because of arcane filibuster rules. It probably would have died anyhow in a hopelessly gerrymandered House, where a small number of conservative radicals—many of them heavily backed by gun manufacturers and the NRA—hold a wildly disproportionate sway.

It's possible that our glaring gun-violence problem will someday be addressed. There are certainly some promising changes happening at the local level. But the question remains: How many thousands of Americans will have to die first—and why must we remain so pathetically ill equipped to deal with even the most basic and solvable problems facing the American people?



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50,000

Highest estimated number of women to have been raped during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the early 1990s

64,000

Highest estimated number of internally displaced women in Sierra Leone who suffered sexual violence at the hands of armed combatants

40

Average number of women raped daily in South Kivu due to armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo

4

Special Forces soldiers at Fort Bragg who killed their wives within a six-week period in 2002; three had recently returned from duty in Afghanistan

"It is now more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier in a modern conflict."

—Maj. Gen. Patrick Cammaert, Royal Netherlands Marines and UN force commander, 2008

Bureau of Sex Slavery

For Yanar and my sisters in Iraq and Syria.

I am thinking of the price list leaked from the ISIS Sex Slave Market that included women and girls on the same list as cattle. ISIS needed to impose price controls, as they were worried about a downturn in their market.

Forty- to 50-year-old women were priced at \$41, 30- to 40-year-olds at \$62, 20- to 30-year-olds at \$82, and 1- to 9-year-old children at \$165. Women over 50 weren't even listed. They had no market value. They were discarded like milk cartons with past-sale-date markers. But they weren't simply abandoned in some smelly dung heap of trash. First, they were probably tortured, raped, beheaded, thrown onto a pile of rotting corpses. I am thinking of a 1-year-old child's body for sale and what it would be like for a hefty, sex-deprived, war-driven 30-year-old soldier to buy her, package her, take her home like a new television. What would he be feeling or thinking as he unwrapped her baby flesh and raped her with his penis the size of her tiny body?

I am thinking that in 2015, I am actually reading an online "Best Practices for Sex Slavery" manual with step-by-step instructions and rules for how to treat your sex slave, published by a very organized wing (Bureau of Sex Slavery) of a rogue government with the unapologetic mandate of regulating the raping, beating, buying, and enslaving of women.

Here are examples of the dos and don'ts in the manual: "It is permissible to beat the female slave as a [form of] *darb ta'deeb* [disciplinary beating], [but] it is forbidden to [use] *darb al-takseer* [literally, breaking beating], [darb] *al-tashaffi* [beating for the purpose of achieving gratification], or [darb] *al-ta'dheeb* [torture beating]. Further, it is forbidden to hit the face."

I am wondering how the ISIS bureaucrats will distinguish punches, kicks, and choking as acts of discipline from acts of sexual gratification. Will a team from the Bureau break in and check for hard-ons as the beatings of slaves occur? And how will they know what actually made the soldier hard? Many men get turned on solely by the assertion of power. And if it is determined that the soldier beat, choked, or kicked his slave for pleasure, what will the punishment be? Will the soldier be forced to return the slave and lose his deposit, pay a steep fine, or simply be made to pray harder?

I am thinking how easy it is to make ISIS a monstrous aberration when they are, in fact, an outcome of a long continuum of multiple crimes and disorders. Their sexual atrocities vary only in design and application from those of many other warlords in other wars. What's shocking and new is the brazen and unabashed display of these advertised crimes on the Internet, the commercial normalization of these atrocities, the ISIS app, using rape as a recruiting tool. But their work and its rapid proliferation doesn't exist

in a historical vacuum. It is escalated and legitimized by centuries of rampant impunity for sexual violence.

This led me to thinking about the comfort women, among the first modern-day sex slaves. These young girls, mostly from Asia, were abducted in their prime by the Japanese Imperial Army in World War II to be held in comfort stations, providing sex to Japanese soldiers in service of their country. The women were raped sometimes 70 times a day. If they got too tired and were unable to move, they would be chained to their beds and continue to be raped like limp sacks. The comfort women were silenced in their shame for 45 years; for 25 years since, they have marched and stood vigil in the rain demanding justice. Now only a few remain, while just last month, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sidestepped a direct apology yet again.

I am thinking about the inertia, silence, and paralysis that have stalled and prevented the investigation and prosecution of sexual crimes against Muslim, Croat, and Serb women raped in camps in the former Yugoslavia; African-American women and girls raped on plantations in the South; Jewish women and girls raped in Ger-

Terms like "re-raped" have now become "re-re-raped."

man concentration camps; Native-American women and girls raped on reservations in the United States. I am hearing the cries of the permanently unsettled ghosts of violated women and girls in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Haiti, Guatemala, the Philippines, Sudan, Chechnya, Nigeria, Colombia, Nepal—the list goes on. I am thinking of the last eight years I spent in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where a similar conflagration of predatory capitalism, centuries of colonialism, endless war, and violence in the name of mineral theft has left thousands of women and girls without organs, sanity, families, or a future. And how terms like "re-raped" have now become "re-re-raped."

I am thinking that I have been writing this same piece for 20 years. I have tried it with data and detachment, passion and pleading, and existential despair. Even now, as I write, I wonder if we have evolved a language to meet this century that would trump a piercing wail.

I am thinking about the failure of every patriarchal institution to intervene in any meaningful way, and how structures like the United Nations amplify the problem by sending soldiers as peacekeepers, who are meant to protect women and girls but become rapists themselves.

I am thinking of Shock and Awe and how it helped unleash Rape and Behead. We all knew then in our bodies and beings as we marched against the pointless, immoral war on Iraq—millions of us disregarded citizens around the world—what shrapnel-filled hurts and humiliations and darkness would be unleashed with those deadly 3,000 US Tomahawk missiles.

I am thinking of religious fundamentalism and God the Father and how many women have been raped in His name and how many massacred and murdered. I am thinking about the notion of rape as prayer and a Theology of Rape, a Religion of Rape. And how this practice is one of the largest world religions, growing by hundreds of converts every day, given that 1 billion women will be beaten or raped in their lifetime.

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-Rex Reed, *NEW YORK OBSERVER*

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-Peter Travers, *Rolling Stone*

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REDFORD IS EXCELLENT, ONE ICON PLAYING ANOTHER.
IT'S GOING TO BE A HOT-BUTTON MOVIE."

-Tim Gray, *Variety*



Cate Blanchett Robert Redford Topher Grace Elisabeth Moss And Dennis Quaid

Truth



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No matter how empathetic we are, how many survivors we treat, how many daughters we bury, the war against us rages on.

I am thinking of the manic speed at which new and grotesque methods for commodifying and desecrating the bodies of women multiply in a system where what is most alive, whether the earth or women, must be objectified and annihilated in order to escalate consumption, growth, and amnesia.

I am thinking of the thousands of young men and women from the West between the ages of 15 and 20 who signed up to join ISIS. What compelled them to do it? Poverty, alienation, Islamophobia, rage at the imperialist destruction of their homelands, identity, responsibility?

I am thinking of what my activist sister told me on Skype from Baghdad this week: "ISIS is a virus, and the only thing to do with a virus is exterminate it." I am wondering how we exterminate a mind-set, bomb a paradigm, blow up misogyny, racism, capitalism, imperialism, and religious fundamentalism?

I am thinking, or maybe I am unable to think, caught inside the ongoing mind-fuck of this century. Knowing on the one hand that the only way forward is a total re-writing of the current story, a deep and studied collective examination of the root causes of these various violences in all their economical, psychological, racial, and patriarchal parts, which requires time; and knowing on the other that at the same moment, here and now, 3,000

Yazidi women are being beaten, raped, and tortured.

I am thinking of the women, the thousands of women around this world, who have worked endlessly for years and years, exhausting every fiber of their beings, to make rape a real issue, to end this pathology of violence and hatred toward us; but no matter how logical we are, how patient, how empathetic, how many studies we do, how many numbers we show, how many survivors we treat, how many stories we hear, how many daughters we bury, how many cancers we get, the war against us rages on, each day more methodical, more brazen, more brutal, more psychotic. I am thinking that ISIS—like rising sea levels, melting glaciers, and murderous temperatures—may be the scalding indicator that the endgame for women is near. The day has arrived when aeons of women's rage must in turn coalesce into a fiery volcanic force, unleashing the global vagina fury of female goddesses Kali, Oya, Pele, Mami Wata, Hera, Durga, Inanna, and Ixchel, and let our wrath lead the way.

I am thinking of the famous female Yazidi folk singer Xate Zhangali, and imagining that after finding the heads of her sisters hanging from poles in her village square, she asked the Kurdish government to arm and train the women, and how now the Sun Girls, the women's militia she formed, are fighting ISIS in the mountains of Sinjar. And in this moment, after years of working to end violence,

I am dreaming of thousands of crates of AK-47s falling from the skies, landing in the villages and centers and farms and lands of women, breasted warriors rising in armies for life.

This led me to love, thinking about love, how the failure of this century is a failure of love. What are we being called to do, what are we really made of, each of us alive on this planet today? What kind of love, what depth of love, what fierceness and searing love is required? Not a naïve, sentimental neoliberal love, but an unrelenting selfless love. A love that would vanquish systems built on the exploitation of multitudes for the benefit of the few. A love that would catalyze our numb revulsion at crimes against women and humanity into unstoppable collective resistance. A love that revered mystery and dissolved hierarchy. A love that found value in our connection rather than in our competing. A love that ensured that we opened our arms to fleeing refugees rather than building walls to keep them out or teargassing them or removing their dead, bloated bodies from our beaches. A love that would burn so bright it would permeate our deadness and melt our walls, ignite our imaginations, and inspire us to finally break out of this story of death. A love so electric it would jolt us to give our lives for life itself, if necessary. Who will be the brave, furious, visionary authors of our manual of revolutionary love? EVE ENSLER

Eve Ensler, the author of *The Vagina Monologues*, is a playwright and activist.

COMIX NATION

Jen Sorensen



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Q&A **BOOTS RILEY**

Poet, rapper, and filmmaker Boots Riley has just published *Tell Homeland Security—We Are the Bomb*, a collection of songs, commentaries, and stories

from his work with the Oakland hip-hop group the Coup and the band Street Sweeper Social Club. Riley has been involved in political activism for decades, from police-brutality protests to supporting Occupy Oakland.

—Laura Flanders

LF: How would you describe what you do?

BR: I try to find creative ways to put ideas out to make the ground fertile for organizers.

LF: Your family were organizers.

BR: My father joined the NAACP when he was 12, in the '50s. He was part of the organizing efforts that led to some of the first sit-ins in North Carolina. Then CORE moved him to San Francisco, and he joined SDS and the Progressive Labor Party. He was involved in the San Francisco State strike, where he met my mother. What I remember of their organizing days was parties: They'd be sitting around talking, and then it would turn into people dancing and playing cards. So I had a different view of organizing; it meant the local neighborhood. If you're an organizer, you should not be in a city and not know the people.

LF: Is there anybody on the 2016 political scene who turns you on?

BR: Nope. Not in the 2012 scene, 2008, or 2004. I think that right now, one of the things that

needs to happen is that social movements need to connect—join with labor struggles like the Fight for 15, and have shutdowns around larger social issues.

LF: You were very involved in Occupy Oakland. What do you tell people who ask what came of that?

BR: I think that for those folks that got burned out when they were in Occupy, that has to do with the fact that there was a lot of energy—and instead of combining spectacle with the withholding of labor, we got stuck on spectacle.

LF: Stanley Nelson's documentary shows how the Black Panthers used spectacle.

BR: The Panthers stopped wearing the berets and the leather jackets in 1968 because they realized that the spectacle was making people feel like, "Wow, that is something [apart from me] to look up to." We don't need to bring back the 1960s; we need to bring back the '20s and '30s as far as strategy.

LF: What did you make of the confrontation between Bernie Sanders and Black Lives Matter?

BR: Elections are a dead end. We have taken our energy away from organizing at the workplace and put it into voting for this or that candidate. I'm not going to be naïve and say that

there aren't differences in candidates. There's a little wiggle room, but the couple things you can get are far outweighed by the decimation of mass movements that happens when any election comes around.

LF: Do you have any thoughts on the film *Straight Outta Compton*?

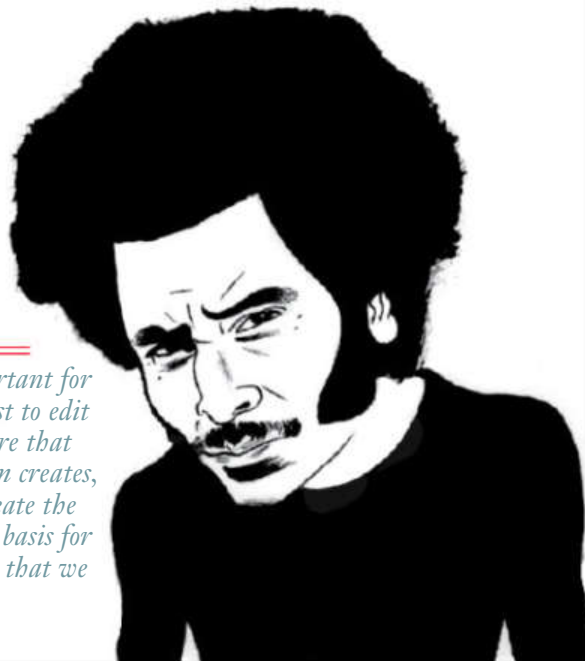
BR: There was a sea change in organizing when [NWA's] "Fuck tha Police" came out. Before, even dope dealers I knew had this feeling, like, the police are the good guys. "Fuck tha Police" changed that orientation; it kind of chronicles that. [Their songs have] got misogyny, they've got glorifying murdering each other, things like that, because it comes out of the culture that capitalism has created. I think it's important for us not just to edit the culture that capitalism cre-

ates, but to create the material basis for a culture that we want. The 12-year-old right now that is involved in that movement may be the next Dr. Dre, right?

LF: There's a line in the Coup song "Underdogs": "They'd tear this motherfucker up if they really loved you." What would we be doing today if we really loved each other?

BR: Cornel West has that famous line: "Justice is what love looks like in public." I like that. I think what we would be doing is making a society based on what we know is right. We know that there shouldn't be a few people on top taking everything, and we know that if two people work on making this table, and it's sold for \$300, they shouldn't get \$10. If we created a society based on love, it would be a society without exploitation. ■

It's important for us not just to edit the culture that capitalism creates, but to create the material basis for a culture that we want.





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FOR THE CHILDREN

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During the latest Republican debate, Carly Fiorina lied about having seen grisly footage of a fetus being kept alive by Planned Parenthood in order to harvest its brain tissue. This footage does not exist, nor does the procedure. What does exist is fetal-tissue research, now under attack by Republicans, but fundamental to saving lives. Based on pre-vaccine averages, we can say that millions of lives have been saved:

WORLDWIDE:

1.6 MILLION deaths prevented each year by the measles vaccine

550,000 cases of permanent paralysis or death prevented each year by the polio vaccine

IN THE UNITED STATES:

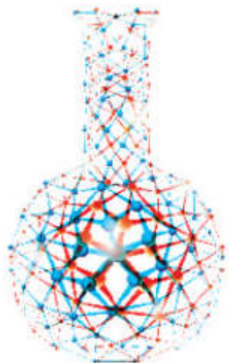
400,000 deaths prevented each year by the hepatitis-B vaccine

3.9 MILLION deaths prevented each year, on average, by the varicella (chicken pox and shingles) vaccine

160,000 deaths prevented each year, on average, by the mumps vaccine

48,000 deaths prevented each year, on average, by the rubella vaccine

114,000 deaths prevented each year, on average, by the hepatitis-A vaccine



Katha Pollitt



Fetal Subtraction

The true aim of fetal-tissue bans is to make abortion providers look heartless.

If you think fetal-tissue research is wrong and should be banned, would you refuse to use any therapies that may come out of it? I thought not. I've posed this question to abortion opponents before, but so far, no one has said, Yes, Katha, I would rather let Alzheimer's turn my brain into cottage cheese and ketchup than benefit from this diabolical practice. If I get Parkinson's, HIV, breast cancer, diabetes, or the flu; if I go blind from macular degeneration; if I have a miscarriage, so be it. Treatments for those conditions are still being developed, but surprise! If you have been vaccinated for polio, mumps, measles, chicken pox, hepatitis, or rabies, it may be too late for you to stand your ethical ground: You have already benefited from fetal-tissue research. This is, after all, a practice that's been legal since the 1930s. In 1954, John Enders, Thomas Weller, and Frederick Robbins won the Nobel Prize for work on the polio virus that paved the way for the Salk and Sabin vaccines. They used fetal tissue, the monsters. Should their heirs return the medals?

As has been noted with some glee, when Congress lifted President Reagan's ban on federal funding for the research in 1993, plenty of Republicans voted yea. Among them were Orrin Hatch, Mitch McConnell, Lamar Smith, and Fred Upton, who are now baying for Planned Parenthood's blood in the wake of the videos secretly recorded by anti-choice activists—videos that do not, in fact, show Planned Parenthood officials killing babies to sell their “body parts.” Where did those gentlemen think the tissue would come from, if not abortion? (John Kasich, a congressman at the time, voted no, then as now hardly the “moderate Republican” depicted in the media.) It's amusing to see them try to square that vote with their newfound abhorrence for what it legalized. “On viewing the video,” Upton wrote in July, “the contents can't help but make you weep for the innocents who were sacrificed in such a cavalier manner for alleged profit.” So if Planned Parenthood lost money on fetal tissue, it would be okay to “harvest” it? As long as nobody got graphic about it over wine and salad?

Of course not. This isn't about fetal tissue. It's about abortion. It's about showing those bloody pictures and making providers look greedy and heartless. Fetal-tissue research is collateral dam-

age in the war against Planned Parenthood, and it has already been banned or severely restricted in six states. Nebraska and Wyoming ban the transfer of fetal tissue, and New Jersey and California are considering laws that would limit suppliers' ability to recover costs. In August, Arizona governor Doug Ducey issued a temporary rule requiring abortion clinics to report the destination of fetal tissue to state health officials. North Carolina has just passed a bill criminalizing the sale of tissue from aborted fetuses (already illegal under federal law). For good measure, the same bill defunds Planned Parenthood's teen-pregnancy-prevention

programs. According to state legislator Larry Pittman, the organization distributes contraceptives that “don't work” in order to “get more business.” This is what we are dealing with, people.

Meanwhile, the Wisconsin state legislature is debating not just banning the sale of fetal tissue (already illegal, see above) but making research using tissue from any fetus aborted after

January 1, 2015, a felony. Leading the charge in the Assembly is Tea Partier André Jacque, who in a previous session proposed an amendment to the state constitution recognizing fertilized eggs as people. Like many opponents of Planned Parenthood, Jacque pooh-poohs the importance of fetal tissue. “If aborted fetal tissue is available, [researchers] don't feel that they need to try an alternative. They're going with the most convenient, the laziest route.”

Not so, says Robert Golden, dean of the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. Those who claim that fetal tissue is unnecessary “are not talking to leaders in the field.” (When NPR's *Diane Rehm Show* took up the topic, the argument that fetal-tissue research is outmoded was presented by the research director of the Charlotte Lozier Institute, an anti-abortion outfit, while a distinguished professor from the Johns Hopkins



If you've been vaccinated for polio, measles, hepatitis, or rabies, you've already benefited from fetal-tissue research.

School of Medicine made the case for its continued usefulness.) Besides the threat to researchers currently using fetal tissue in their work, Golden said there would be a chilling effect going forward; why would top scientists come to Wisconsin? The proposed ban comes on top of other attacks on the state university—severe budget cuts, threats to tenure, and an attempt by Governor Scott Walker to rewrite the institution's mission statement to focus on economic development rather than on "the search for truth." "Why is the legislature interfering with research that is totally legal and carefully monitored and reviewed?" Golden asked. "There are some well-intentioned religious people who support the ban, but some of the people leading the charge are using despicable tactics, including slander, threats, and lies. Medical faculty have been compared to Josef Mengele and Frankenstein." (I should mention that Golden is a relative.)

If the Wisconsin bill fails, Golden told me, it may be

because business-oriented conservatives recognize the potential damage to Wisconsin's burgeoning biotech industry. That wouldn't be a good look for Walker, who promised that job creation would be the centerpiece of his governorship. Ironically, the attempt to ban fetal-tissue research may be thwarted not by the demonic might of "the abortion industry," or by the close to 700 Wisconsin faculty members who signed a protest letter, but by the state chamber of commerce.

Sometimes I look at the anti-scientific hot mess our country is becoming and I think, "Okay, America, be like that. Never mind that banning fetal-tissue research will not prevent a single abortion. Never mind that the videos do not show Planned Parenthood doing anything illegal. Let some other country do the science, patent the cures, lead the world in biotech. You just keep planting those churches and turning our universities into trade schools for middle management. We're number one!"



I see some of you are allowing the University of YouTube to inform you about Planned Parenthood.

@Jamilah-Lemieux, writer and editor Jamilah Lemieux

SNAPSHOT/KACPER PEMPEL

Striking Coal

Piotr Dytko, who has spent 24 years working in the mines, poses for a photo 500 meters underground at the Boleslaw Smialy coal mine in southern Poland. Polish coal miners have staged strikes over fears of salary delays as the European Union's largest coal-mining company verges on bankruptcy.



REUTERS

BACK ISSUES/1868

Is the GAN Possible?

In this issue, Jon Baskin reviews *Purity* by Jonathan Franzen, whose last novel, *Freedom* (2010), landed him on the cover of *Time* with the bizarrely un-articled epithet "Great American Novelist." Franzen fans or no, *Nation* readers might be interested to learn that the very concept of the "great American novel"—or GAN, as another *Nation* contributor, Henry James, abbreviated it—was first proposed and named in these very pages, in an 1868 essay by John William De Forest, a Union Army veteran and early realist writer, who doubted whether it was even possible to write one.

"The obstacles are immense," De Forest noted. "Ask a portrait-painter if he can make a good likeness of a baby, and he will tell you that the features are not sufficiently marked nor the expression sufficiently personal. Is there



not the same difficulty in limning this continental infant of American society, who is changing every year not only in physical attributes, but in the characteristics of his soul?... And then there is such variety and even such antagonism in the component parts of this cataract. When you have made your picture of petrified New England village life, left aground like a boulder near the banks of the Merrimac, does the Mississippian or the Minnesotan or the Pennsylvanian recognize it as American society? We are a nation of provinces, and each province claims to be the court."

—Richard Kreitner

HILLARY ON SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE

So Hillary did *SNL*.
And critics believed she did well.
But Democrats, midst all the fun,
Still wondered how Joe would have done.

Calvin Trillin
Deadline Poet



THE SECRET TO

SANDERS'S SUCCESS

*His campaign isn't doing business as usual—and that's
unleashed the creativity of its grassroots volunteers.*

by D.D. GUTTENPLAN



“**T**HERE IS NO SECRET FORMULA TO WINNING IN NEW Hampshire,” says Julia Barnes. “Volunteers recruited plus tactics equals the win number.” A native of Hollis, a town about 25 miles south of here, Barnes is the state director for Bernie Sanders’s presidential campaign. By “tactics,” she means boots on the ground: the slow, unglamorous, persistent work of contacting likely primary voters and identifying Sanders supporters—and then making sure all of them actually vote.

By “volunteers,” she means people like Elizabeth Ropp. “I watched Bernie filibuster against tax cuts for the wealthy, and I really hoped that someday he’d run for president,” Ropp tells me. A community acupuncturist in Manchester—“We provide affordable acupuncture on a sliding-fee scale”—Ropp, with her husband, hosted the first Sanders house party in the state earlier this year. “I live in a small bungalow, and our living room, dining room, and kitchen were crammed,” she says. “We had about 130 people, and some of them had to stand outside.”

Or Janice Kelble, a post-office employee for 29 years who now works for the New Hampshire Postal Workers union. Last month, when it became the first union in the state to endorse Sanders, Kelble almost missed the announcement. “My husband has pretty advanced Parkinson’s disease,” she says, “and I didn’t think he could sit through the whole event. So I had to run home and then hurry back to Manchester. It’s kind of hard to juggle, but Bernie has been there for us, and I really wanted to be there for him.”

Or Bob Friedlander, a doctor who practiced clinical oncology for 27 years before switching to palliative medicine. Back in 2003, Friedlander founded Doctors for Dean in support of his fellow physician’s short-lived campaign for the presidency. This August, he heard Sanders in person for the first time, at a Friends of the Earth meeting in Concord. “Afterwards I thought, ‘I really want to work for him,’” Friedlander says. “In a way, this feels like an extension of my work in palliative care. That was about seeing the patient as a whole person and helping them to vocalize what mattered most to them. Here, too, we’re focusing on what really matters.”

Presidential campaigns are like icebergs. There’s the part you see: the candidate, making speeches or appearing on television, and the supporters, cheering at rallies, wearing buttons, knocking on doors. Then there’s the much larger part you can’t see: the tables at campaign headquarters piled high with leaflets and lawn signs, the paid staff—and the army of volunteers with clipboards working phone banks, keeping track of voter preferences, and making sure “leaners” and undecideds get plenty of follow-up.

New Hampshire’s primary is currently scheduled for February 9, 2016. Bernie Sanders has no path to the White House that doesn’t begin with a win here. In May, he trailed Hillary Clinton among likely voters in the state by 38 points. At the beginning of the summer, he was still 10 points behind. The latest poll puts Sanders ahead of Clinton 42 percent to 28 percent—

Manchester, New Hampshire



Janice Kelble with Sanders at a town-hall event in Franklin, New Hampshire, in August.

a margin traditionally described as a “comfortable lead.” In another sign of his surge, in late September, a Sanders rally at the University of New Hampshire drew over 3,000 supporters; a Clinton event two days earlier at the same place attracted just 600.

How did Sanders pull ahead? His supporters in New Hampshire were happy to talk about what motivated them. But the more I heard, the more I realized that the Sanders campaign really was different—and not just because it had less money. As anyone who has ever watched *The War Room* can tell you, maintaining message discipline is crucial to a winning campaign. (Remember “It’s the economy, stupid?”) Which in turn means a tight, top-down command structure to keep everyone “on message.”

The Sanders campaign is nothing like that. Look below the waterline and instead of a single streamlined operation, you find twin hulls. One is a professionally run, locally focused effort where the candidate’s position on the Northern Pass (a controversial plan to build a high-voltage power line through the state) is as important as his views on immigration and taxes. The other is a parallel structure, a volunteer-based reservoir of energy, talent, and enthusiasm that propelled a senator from a tiny state into a national figure. I’ve come to think of this operation as the Sanders second shift.

AIDAN KING GRADUATED FROM THE University of New Hampshire in 2014. But I met him back home in Montpelier, Vermont, a two-hour drive up I-89. Well over six feet tall, with a boyish face framed by blond fuzz, King is the digital-marketing coordinator for a local winemaker—which, as it’s harvest season, also means he picks his share of grapes. Since December 2013, when he founded Grassroots for Sanders with David Frederick (“a stranger I met on the Internet who lives in San Jose”), King has spent most of his nights “glued to my computer.... Sometimes my girlfriend says, ‘Dude, you’re on the computer too much!’, and I take a break.”

King, who turns 24 this month, is the group’s senior digital organizer. Among other things, he runs the Sanders for President forum on Reddit, the massively popular news and social-networking website. King’s subreddit—a place for the online discussion of all things Bernie—has amassed over 113,000 subscribers to date. If that sounds inconsequential, you probably weren’t paying attention on April 30, when Sanders used Reddit to announce his candidacy. Or to the AMA—“Ask Me Anything”—he did on the site in May. Or to the news on October 1, when the Sanders campaign announced it had raised a whopping \$26 million, largely from small donors online. That put the Vermont socialist within touching distance of Clinton’s \$28 million for the quarter.

In an age when social media have been credited—or blamed—for everything from the Arab Spring to the decline of Western civilization, it’s important to be clear: Facebook “likes” won’t get anyone elected. But social media’s low entry costs have allowed what, at least at this

D.D. Guttenplan, an editor at large for The Nation, is the author of The Nation: A Biography. He’ll be writing regularly in these pages about the 2016 election.

point, remains a decentralized, volunteer-driven guerrilla campaign to challenge the Clinton machine. “You need a lot of people doing stuff for free,” says King, whose earliest political memory is of “when my mom took me to Washington to protest against the Iraq War.”

“I was so excited about Obama. And I still think he’s done amazing things. But I wanted more follow-through,” says King, listing “drone strikes, kill lists, NSA spying on Americans, the expansion of Bush-administration policies, a failed drug war, failed foreign policy,” and the increasing influence of money in politics as his main concerns. “I put a lot of stake in authenticity,” he says. “And I’ve been exposed to Bernie’s politics and his honesty since I was in diapers.”

Hillary Clinton, adds King, “is obviously a smart and powerful woman. I consider myself a liberal, and would of course prefer her to Marco Rubio or Jeb Bush. But I get \$20 haircuts, and I don’t feel represented by someone who was on the board of Wal-Mart. If we can do better—and I think we can—why not try for it?”

Although he’s in regular contact with Kenneth Pennington, the Sanders campaign’s digital director, King and his fellow volunteers “don’t take orders. They don’t dictate the content, although if they want to promote an event or a particular issue, they’ll ask. We’re here to help, not to compete,” he says.

DANIELA PERDOMO’S RELATIONSHIP WITH the Sanders campaign is even more detached. “I’ve never even been to Vermont,” she laughs. The US-born daughter of an Israeli mother and a Guatemalan father, Perdomo spent most of her childhood in Brazil, returning to the United States for college, where she volunteered as a community organizer. After a stint as a staff writer for the *Los Angeles Times*—“because I spoke Spanish, they put me on what I call the ‘structural inequality’ beat. Basically, I was writing about other brown people”—she took a series of tech jobs on the West Coast and wrote for Alternet. Then the recession hit.

Following the job market back to New York, Perdomo worked for a couple of start-ups before founding her own company, goTenna, which lets mobile-phone users send texts and share location data even in areas with no phone service. Her personal trajectory may be unusual, but the political impulse that spurred Perdomo to also work a second unpaid shift is beginning to sound familiar.

“I first came across Bernie Sanders during the Obama-care debate, when it seemed like there was a real chance

“I put a lot of stake in authenticity. And I’ve been exposed to Bernie’s honesty since I was in diapers.”

—Aidan King

Daniela Perdomo created FeeltheBern.org in 32 days with the help of 125 volunteers.

for universal healthcare. I was on board with Obama from the first day, but when he took the public option off the table, I was pretty disappointed,” she says.

“When Sanders first talked about running, I thought, ‘He can’t win.’ I donated, because that’s how democracy should work: You should put your money behind a candidate who represents your views. I still couldn’t convince any of my friends.”

Until she found her way to the Sanders subreddit. “Suddenly, I heard conversations no one in my office was talking about,” she says. But when she tried to research Sanders’s record, “all I found were dismissive news stories. So I decided to build a website optimized for search and social media.” Before she knew it, Perdomo had 125 volunteers, and in 32 days had made FeeltheBern.org. “This is support you cannot buy. It can only be free,” Perdomo says. Since its launch on August 12, the website has garnered over 2 million views.

What does the Sanders campaign make of her effort? “I wasn’t even in touch with them until we launched,” Perdomo says. “They trust what we’re doing.” Sanders’s headquarters in Burlington, Vermont, “may be the sun, but there are a lot of planets. And here’s why it’s so easy to coordinate: because we don’t have to.”

“Getting out the vote, meeting people face-to-face—those are still crucial,” Perdomo says. “But it’s so exciting seeing what can be done with the new tools available.”

Another example of the new tool kit is the Bernie Post, a news website devoted to covering the campaign. Unlike the Reddit page, its look is slick and fairly traditional. Launched in August, the Bernie Post attracted 40,000 readers in its first three weeks. When I contacted editor Torin Peel to request an interview, he told me he lives in Geelong, Australia—and that he’s still in high school.

“I’m really interested in political campaigns because I’m a strong believer in grassroots politics. I want to make sure that everyone’s treated equally, that the planet is looked after,” he tells me via Twitter. “I don’t like being 16. It’s something I don’t tout around, because it draws interest right away. Also, I don’t think it’s all that unusual anymore for people my age to be getting involved with stuff like this. Perhaps in previous election cycles, but I’ve seen so many young people fired up by this campaign.”

BACK IN NEW HAMPSHIRE, JULIA BARNES SAYS that with eight offices spread out across the state, the Sanders campaign is still “in the middle of Act I. We’ve got our stage sets, and we know who our actors are.”

So what happens next? “A ton of voter contact,” she says. “Folks sit down with you and talk about their issues. Healthcare. Student loans. Campaign finance. The environment. And you have to reach out to all kinds of groups. Issue groups. Neighborhood associations. Knitting circles. Plus there’s a fundamental independent streak that runs through this state, which also keeps things interesting.”

“Politics is our state sport,” Burt Cohen tells me. He should know. A former majority leader of the New Hampshire Senate, Cohen hosts *Keeping Democracy Alive*, a political radio program and podcast. As the plaque on the grounds of the state capitol in Concord proudly pro-



claims: “Taking their responsibility seriously, New Hampshire voters test contenders during the months leading to the primary.” Or as Cohen puts it, “People here expect to meet every candidate personally—several times.”

But it isn’t a popularity contest. “Bernie’s a little gruff,” says Elizabeth Ropp. He’s “not your typical baby-kissing candidate,” says Janice Kelble. And although Barnes says that Sanders has been “doing fundraisers” for Democrats across the state, his long history of running outside the party is hurting him—not just in Vermont, where both Governor Peter Shumlin and Senator Patrick Leahy have endorsed Clinton, but in New Hampshire as well. “A lot of rank-and-file Democrats feel the tide’s going our way,” says Tim Horrigan, a four-term state representative from Durham who’s still undecided. “Bernie only joined the party a few months ago. And we need someone who can win the general election.”

While Sanders’s record may not win over the “grass-tops”—local elected officials like Horrigan, who traditionally wield a lot of influence in New Hampshire—the grassroots feel they know where he stands. “Other candidates change from one week to the next,” says Bob Friedlander. “Bernie doesn’t change from one decade to the next.”

“I can’t recall us endorsing a primary candidate before,” says Kelble of the New Hampshire Postal Workers. “Usually I wait until the national AFL-CIO make their endorsements, and then work on the Labor Program [the AFL-CIO’s national member-to-member outreach].”

So what makes this year different? “Bernie—he’s a fighter. When the CWA and IBEW went on strike against FairPoint, he was on the picket line. He held a town meeting back in 2011 on the importance of maintaining a public postal service. He’s fought for family medical leave and against unfair scheduling practices in the workplace.” To Kelble, those are not abstract issues. “I was a single parent for many years,” she says. “But I almost had to quit the only job that gave me a path to a middle-class life. If you can’t get someone to take care of your kid, what do you do? And I had a union job.”

IN AN INTERVIEW WITH BUZZFEED, PENNINGTON said the Sanders campaign differs from past grassroots digital efforts in that it relies on volunteers for a lot of the basic work of building a field operation. So far, the Sanders second shift has been the campaign’s secret weapon.

“In a normal campaign, you spend an enormous amount of effort signing up volunteers,” says Barnes. “We don’t have to waste time doing that here. Our folks are engaged and ready to go—to the point where we’re dragging behind them! We need to turn all those people who go to rallies into workers.”

If the tag team of conventional ground game and roll-your-own web effort carries Sanders to victory in New Hampshire and Iowa, both teams will deserve the credit. But as the battleground shifts from small states, where the premium is on intensity and commitment, to larger states, where organization becomes more important, the contrast between the senator’s ad hoc insurgency and the disciplined professionals in Clinton’s corner may not remain so favorable. On the other hand, Sanders’s recent fund-



Elizabeth Ropp hosts a campaign brunch with the Progressive Democrats of America.

“What are you going to do? Stay home because you’re afraid of heartbreak?”

—Elizabeth Ropp



Aidan King, 24, the co-founder and senior digital organizer of Grassroots for Sanders.

raising success has allowed the campaign to draw up plans to expand into Virginia and other Super Tuesday states.

Hillary Clinton may still stop Sanders, but she can no longer afford to dismiss him—or alienate his supporters. “Don’t you get that this *is* the base?” says Ropp. “Personally, I have a lot of time for Hillary,” says Friedlander, “and if she wins, I’ll do whatever I can to help.” Provided, that is, she wins in a fair fight. Limiting the Democrats to just six debates, with the New Hampshire event scheduled “between Hanukkah and Christmas, it looks like [Democratic National Committee chair] Debbie Wasserman Shultz has her thumb on the scale,” says Burt Cohen.

Even if it never gets beyond Iowa, the Sanders campaign has already revealed a yearning for change—and an enthusiasm for radical solutions—that even six months ago seemed beyond imagination. The 2016 election was supposed to be a snoozefest enlivened only by the dynastic battle between the houses of Bush and Clinton. Instead, Donald Trump has taken the Republicans on their wildest ride since 1964, while the populist fervor of Sanders and his supporters prompts comparisons with George McGovern, or even Robert Kennedy’s 1968 campaign.

We know how those stories ended. When I meet with a *Nation* reading group in Hanover, there is little support for Clinton, even though the membership is 80 percent women. However, along with enthusiasm for Sanders’s program and amazement at how far he’s come, there is also dread at what another electoral defeat would mean. “I worry about leaving young people with a sense of futility,” says Susan McGrew.

That, too, feels familiar—and hard to shake off, as is the fear that the primaries take place inside a kind of left bubble, doomed to burst on contact with the electorate. But what if 2016 really is one of those years where history turns? Though Syriza’s shaky survival in Greece may not be grounds for celebration, take in the rise of Podemos in Spain and veteran radical Jeremy Corbyn’s pundit-defying victory in the British Labour Party, and it begins to seem like something is happening here, even if we don’t know what it is.

Maybe those of us who keep wondering if the energy and hope inspired by the Sanders campaign can survive defeat have been asking the wrong question. Maybe we should start considering whether they can survive success. “What are you going to do?” Elizabeth Ropp counters when I put the question to her. “Stay home because you’re afraid of heartbreak?”

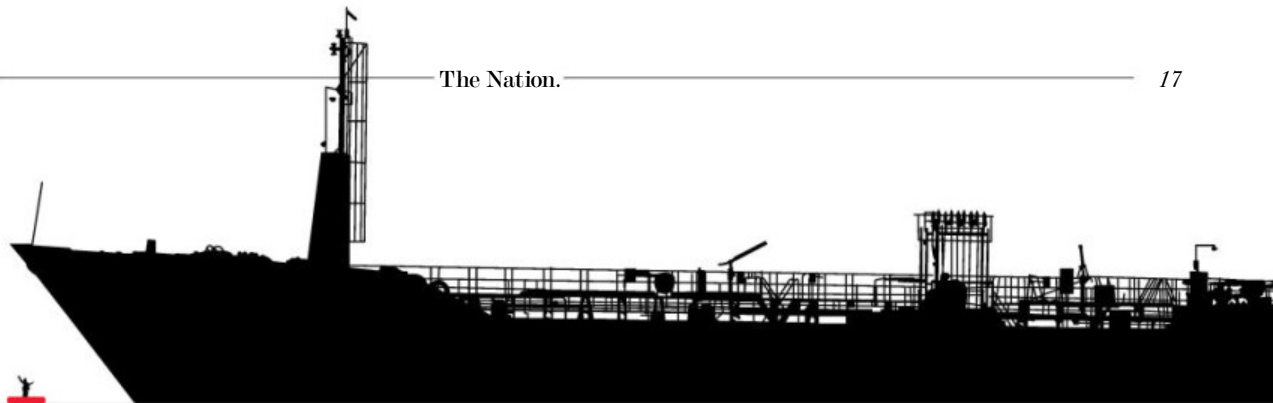


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ON THE FRONT LINES OF CLIMATE JUSTICE

The new American radicals know that it's time to fight like there's nothing left to lose but our humanity.

by WEN STEPHENSON

This is really happening. The Arctic and the glaciers are melting. The oceans are rising and acidifying. The corals are bleaching, the great forests dying and burning. The storms and floods, the droughts and heat waves, are intensifying. The farms and savannahs are parched and drying. Nations are disappearing. People are dying. Mass extinction is unfolding. And all of it sooner and faster than science predicted. The window in which to prevent the worst scenarios is closing before our eyes.

And the fossil-fuel industry—which holds the fate of humanity in its carbon reserves—is doubling down, economically and politically, on all this destruction. **We face an unprecedented situation—a radical situation. It demands a radical response.**

This is about waking up, individually and collectively, to the climate catastrophe that is upon us—truly waking up to it, intellectually, morally, and spiritually.



In recent years, I have come to know and work alongside some truly remarkable, wide-awake people—those I think of as new American radicals—in the struggle to build a stronger movement for climate justice: a movement less like environmentalism and more like the radically transformative movements that have altered the course of history in the past, from abolitionism to civil rights.

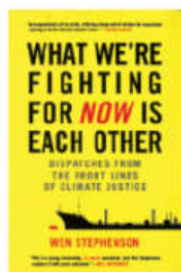
Of course, we must begin by acknowledging the science and the sheer lateness of the hour—the fact that, if we intend to address the climate catastrophe in a serious way, our chance for a smooth, gradual transition has passed. We must acknowledge the fact that without immediate action at all levels to radically reduce greenhouse emissions and decarbonize our economies—requiring a society-wide mobilization and a thus far unseen degree of global cooperation, leading to the effective end of the fossil-fuel industry as we know it—the kind of livable and just future we all want is simply inconceivable.

It seems fairly obvious that the reason we don't hear politicians, or the "serious" people in our media, talking much about the true gravity of this situation is that to propose anything that would actually begin to address it with the necessary urgency at the national and global level would simply sound too extreme, if not outright crazy, within mainstream political conversation. *Leave fossil fuels in the ground? Who are you kidding? Be serious.*

This is the reality—or the surreality—of the historical moment in which we find ourselves. At this late hour, with the clock ticking down on civilization, to be serious about climate change—based, mind you, on what science and not ideology prescribes—is to be radical. The climate catastrophe is so fundamental that it strikes to the root of who we are: It confronts us with a kind of radical necessity—a moral necessity.

Mainstream critics will say that radicals have no "plan," no "workable solutions." (If you believe that, have a look at what Germany and Denmark are doing.) But it's not the movement's job to offer detailed policy prescriptions that fit within the confines of this country's current politics. Given our political deadlock, the movement's job is to tell the truth, however extreme—and to force those in power to recognize that even the outer limit of what our current politics will allow (a modest carbon tax, for example) is utterly inadequate to the crisis. The movement's job is to force that reckoning.

On September 21, 2014, some 300,000 people converged on the streets of Manhattan for the historic People's Climate March, demanding serious action from world leaders. One of the slogans for the march was "To change everything, we need everyone." I couldn't agree more. But here's what would really change everything: first acknowledging that the mainstream, Washington-focused environmental movement—and the mainstream, Big Green "climate movement" that grew out of it—has failed. That we've already lost the "climate fight," if that means "solving the climate crisis" and saving some semblance of the world we know. That it was lost before it began, because it got started so late. That it's time now to fight like there's nothing left to lose but our humanity.



“I know
it's going
to take
massive,
almost
unimag-
inable
system
change.”

—activist Grace Cagle

Wen Stephenson
is the author of
*What We're
Fighting
for Now Is
Each Other:
Dispatches
From the
Front Lines of
Climate Justice*,
from which this
article is adapted.
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YUDITH NIETO, AN ORGANIZER WITH THE SMALL, grassroots Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services—or TEJAS—was 24 when I met her in Houston's Manchester neighborhood on a hot and soupy afternoon in July 2013. Mostly Latino and overwhelmingly poor, the east-side community that Yudith calls home is surrounded by oil refineries along the Houston Ship Channel and other heavily polluting industrial facilities—a chemical plant, a tire plant, a metal-crushing facility, a train yard, and a sewage-treatment plant—and sits at the intersection of two major expressways. The people who live there breathe some of the country's most toxic air.

Yudith got involved with TEJAS in September 2011, when its founders, the father-and-son team of Juan and Bryan Parras, rallied the Manchester community against the Keystone XL pipeline, alerting residents to the increased toxic emissions from processing tar-sands crude at the refineries, and recruiting people to testify at an upcoming public hearing on the pipeline in Port Arthur.

Yudith recalled the hearing. “We get there, and the room is full of industry people. It was really eye-opening, and painful,” she said. “They were hateful, snickering and making jokes at us.”

“I took it very personally,” Yudith said. “I was trying to represent my family, people I care about, and they had no compassion toward people who would be suffering. All they talked about was money, jobs, ‘what America needs.’ No, this is about health, communities. I looked them in the eye and said, ‘I don’t want this in my neighborhood. How are we going to survive this? We already have enough shit going on in the air. We don’t need any more.’”

Working alongside Yudith in Houston were several members of Tar Sands Blockade, the diverse group of mostly young, radical climate-justice activists who had mounted a high-risk campaign of nonviolent direct action to stop construction of the Keystone XL's southern leg, running from Oklahoma to the Gulf Coast through East Texas. (Keystone South, as it's known, went operational in January 2014.)

Grace Cagle, 23 at the time, was born and raised in Fort Worth. She'd been a biology major at the University of North Texas in Denton when she fell in with the folks from Rising Tide and Occupy Denton, and then helped launch Tar Sands Blockade in the summer of 2012. Grace—or Luna, as she was known in the East Texas woods where she risked her life—had taken part in a dramatic, 85-day aerial tree blockade along the pipeline route near Winnsboro. Now she sat in a chair across from me in the cramped space and fluorescent light of the TEJAS office on Harrisburg Boulevard, where she was volunteering as an intern, helping organize in the hard-hit Manchester neighborhood.

So what was it, I wanted to know, that really led her to risk her neck, 80 feet up in a tree, trying to stop that pipeline?

“What am I going to do to fix climate change?” she replied. “I’m not just going to sit in a tree. I mean, nobody buys that. I know it’s going to take massive, almost unimaginable system change—or everything’s just gonna flood.”

She agreed with me that the sort of system change required won't happen through politics as usual. Something's going to have to force it. "That's what originally brought me into the organizing work," she said.

Grace said she'd come to see two converging ideas or motivations forming in her mind. One was the urgency of the climate crisis, which led her to nonviolent direct action. The other, she said, was the experience of actually being out in the endangered landscape near Winnsboro, where the blockade began. "Just this overwhelming sense of place," she said, "that I wanted to defend."

"They came over the creek," Grace said. "They had a feller buncher—it grabs the trees, cuts them, and throws them. And they're coming like 10 feet, 20 feet away from me, practically at the base of my tree. I thought they were going to kill me.... I knew that if I moved, they were there with their machines, and they wanted to cut those trees down—and they would come through our section."

She leaped out onto a line, dangling in a harness, so she could protect two trees at once.

"That's when it all reconverged for me," she said. "At that moment, I was in total solidarity with the [First Nations] people in Canada, around the mines, and the people here in Manchester."

I asked her why it was strategic for Tar Sands Blockade to engage with TEJAS and help organize in Manchester.

"We're organizing in Manchester because it needs to be done," she said. "It's not a means to an end. But it's also one of the hot spots where it aligns with the climate work, where our goals align with community needs. I would work in Manchester even if climate change didn't exist."

Grace told me that the seven months she'd been working in these communities with TEJAS had changed her perspective. She understood the climate science, she said.

"But even as urgent as the climate crisis is, we're not going to solve it by ourselves. So whatever it's going to take to be able to work with other people, even if it takes another 10 years, that's what it takes. And that can be harder than sitting in a tree or locking yourself to something."

I'M BOTH CALMER NOW AND MORE radical," Tim DeChristopher said to me one afternoon in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "I mean, personally I'm more at peace now. And having gone to prison, I'm more politically radical. After spending a couple years in the custody of the government, I have a better picture of the nature of the government we have, and I'd say that it's my goal to overthrow our current form of government."

Tim sat across from me at a small table in the aptly named Shay's (think rebellion), an English-style pub across the street from the Harvard Kennedy School—where one can earn a graduate degree in the administration of government. But Tim is a stu-

“It's my goal to overthrow our current form of government, our current system of corporate rule.”

—Tim DeChristopher

For constant revolution: "I'm more at peace now," says climate activist Tim DeChristopher. "And having gone to prison, I'm more politically radical."



dent at the Divinity School, appropriately located in the opposite corner of Harvard's campus. Tim's path to Harvard was, you could say, unorthodox. In 2011, he was sentenced to two years in federal prison for monkey-wrenching a corrupt Bureau of Land Management auction of oil- and gas-drilling leases on public land in southern Utah, winning bids worth \$1.8 million that he couldn't pay. His action and trial helped galvanize the growing climate-justice movement, and he's become a leading voice.

"Overthrow" is a pretty strong word, I suggested.

"I mean our current system of corporate rule," Tim replied. "I say 'overthrow' because I recognize that the people currently in power are not going to willingly transfer power into a democratic form. In recent history, nonviolent revolutions have been far more successful than violent ones—but it still takes that kind of pressure."

I told Tim that it seems impossible to have an honest conversation about the climate movement without acknowledging how late the hour is. I wondered whether that had anything to do with why he'd chosen to go to divinity school.

"Why I'm here is very closely connected with the fact that we are already committed to a path of chaotic and rapid change," Tim said.

"Our job as a movement," he went on, "is no longer just about reducing emissions—we still have to do that, but we also have this new challenge of maintaining our humanity as we navigate this period of rapid and intense change. And with that challenge, with that job, we can't avoid the spiritual aspect of what we're doing. We can't avoid talking about our most fundamental principles, and our most fundamental values, and the things that we want to hold on to the most. We can't avoid talking about our larger worldview and our vision for the world."

Maybe it's understandable, I said, given the magnitude of what we're facing, that the climate movement's activists have resorted to telling ourselves and others certain useful fictions—that we can "solve the climate crisis" or "preserve a livable planet" without deep, radical change.

"There are very few things that make me more hopeless," Tim said, "than a movement based on useful fictions. What's the point of a social movement that can't tell the truth?"

Are the fictions useful, though? I asked.

"No," he said. "The only way in which they're useful is to help people cling to false hope. I don't think you can be effective at fighting the real threats that we face if you refuse to deal with the real world."

I asked Tim what a movement that has given up such false hope would sound like. What would it say? Instead of building a movement to "solve the climate crisis," what are we building a movement to do?

"We are building a movement for climate justice," Tim said. "That's still a relevant concept, a relevant goal: to defend the right of all

people—and not only people of all races or nationalities, but people of all generations—to live healthy lives and have both the agency and the environment necessary to create the lives they want. We are building a movement to hold on to the things about our civilization that are worth keeping, to navigate that period of intense change in a way that maintains our humanity.”

Tim doesn’t see that kind of movement coming from the Big Green groups, which, he argued, have utterly failed.

“I think being in the environmental movement for a long time should be considered a liability,” he said. “It should be like someone who stands up and says, ‘I’ve been in Congress for 30 years’—

you know, you better have a good excuse.”

I pushed back. Those people are working hard, devoting their lives, to keep fossil fuels in the ground—still our overriding moral imperative if we’re going to salvage any hope of climate justice, social justice, in the future. And in the near term, that means not only pushing from the outside; it often means working within the current political system.

“But the kind of change you’re talking about—anything feasible within the current political system—really won’t do us any good,” Tim shot back. “You’re talking about going off the cliff at 40 miles per hour instead of 60.... So, yes, the most urgent



I Want My Progressive TV

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**If MSNBC dumps the left,
where will we turn?**

by LESLIE SAVAN

thing is keeping fossil fuels in the ground. The question is how to do that. We need a different kind of movement, a movement that's about taking power and changing power structures on a fundamental level. And I'm saying the climate movement is not equipped for that kind of struggle. The climate movement that has grown out of the environmental movement—primarily driven by comfortable people, rich people, white people—is about keeping things more or less the same. That's no longer the challenge that we have.

"I don't think it's a coincidence that it's the groups from impoverished and oppressed areas or oppressed constituencies that

are building the kind of movement we need," Tim continued, pointing to the Climate Justice Alliance and indigenous movements like Idle No More and the people on reservations in South Dakota fighting the "black snake" (the Keystone XL pipeline), or groups in Appalachia fighting mountaintop removal. "I think it's because they've experienced part of the challenge that lies ahead for all of us—when there are plenty of reasons for hopelessness, they've chosen to fight back."

Holding on to our humanity in the face of what's coming will be "a never-ending challenge," Tim said. "We need an endless movement and a constant revolution." ■

IN LATE AUGUST, THE GANG ON MSNBC'S *MORNING JOE* WAS DISCUSSING A Quinnipiac University poll that asked voters for the first word they associated with various presidential candidates. The top word for Hillary Clinton was "liar"; for Donald Trump, "arrogant"; for Jeb Bush, "Bush." After everyone had riffed on just how bad the word "Bush" is, the show's conservative co-host and alpha dog, Joe Scarborough, complained that he's been the subject of this sort of poll question, too.

"What were some of the worst [responses]?" co-host Mika Brzezinski asked.

"He works for MSNBC," replied Scarborough, who has long felt trapped in liberal-media hell. "That's always the worst... Not anymore, though, 'cause things have changed," he added, brightening up. "Thank you, Andy."

That's Andy Lack, the NBC News and MSNBC chairman who, since taking over in March, has wiped out all of MSNBC's daytime liberal opinion shows. The idea, the network says, is to rebrand dayside as an extension of NBC News. As for prime time, Rachel Maddow and Chris Matthews will keep their shows, but the future of Chris Hayes's *All In* and Lawrence O'Donnell's *Last Word* are up in the air.

MSNBC will also reportedly expand *Morning Joe*, a show with low ratings but an influential Beltway audience, from three to four hours a day. The extra hour would give center-right and center-left opinion shows roughly equal airtime on the network that's considered the left's best answer to the mighty Fox News.

So if Joe Scarborough, who regularly browbeats any libber ooze out of his co-hosts and guests, is thrilled with the changes at MSNBC, where does that leave progressives? Should we mourn that, along with Jon Stewart's exit, one of the few venues for daily progressive politics on TV is, at best, shrinking? Or should we shrug—since how much of a force for lefty ideas can any corporate-owned commercial entity truly be?

One thing is clear: MSNBC's parade of liberal anchors over the past several years—all pretty much following the same host-desk-panel formula—tanked in the ratings game. In the first quarter of this year, MSNBC's numbers in the desirable 25-to-54 sales demographic hit an all-time low, dropping 39 percent compared to the same period in 2014. In February, Lack axed the low-rated Joy Reid and Ronan Farrow shows. In July, it was *Now With Alex Wagner*, *The Cycle*, and Ed Schultz's *The Ed Show*. Reid, Farrow, Wagner, and *The Cycle*'s Ari Melber landed other gigs at the network; Ed Schultz, the only consistent voice for labor on all of tele-

“The message from the top is that MSNBC and NBC share one set of values.”

—MSNBC source

Leslie Savan writes for The Nation about media and politics.

vision, did not. Al Sharpton's Monday-to-Friday show has been squeezed to just one hour: 8 AM on Sundays. (It's all good, the reverend claims: "I wanted to be Dr. Martin Luther King, not Larry King.")

Daytime now showcases NBC crossovers. Andrea Mitchell and *The Today Show*'s Tamron Hall have kept their shows; Thomas Roberts, NBC Sunday-night anchor Kate Snow, and Chuck Todd fill out the day. A chastened Brian Williams, formerly the star anchor for NBC's nightly news show, has been demoted (though the network won't call it that) to work as a floating, "breaking news" anchor on the cable outlet.

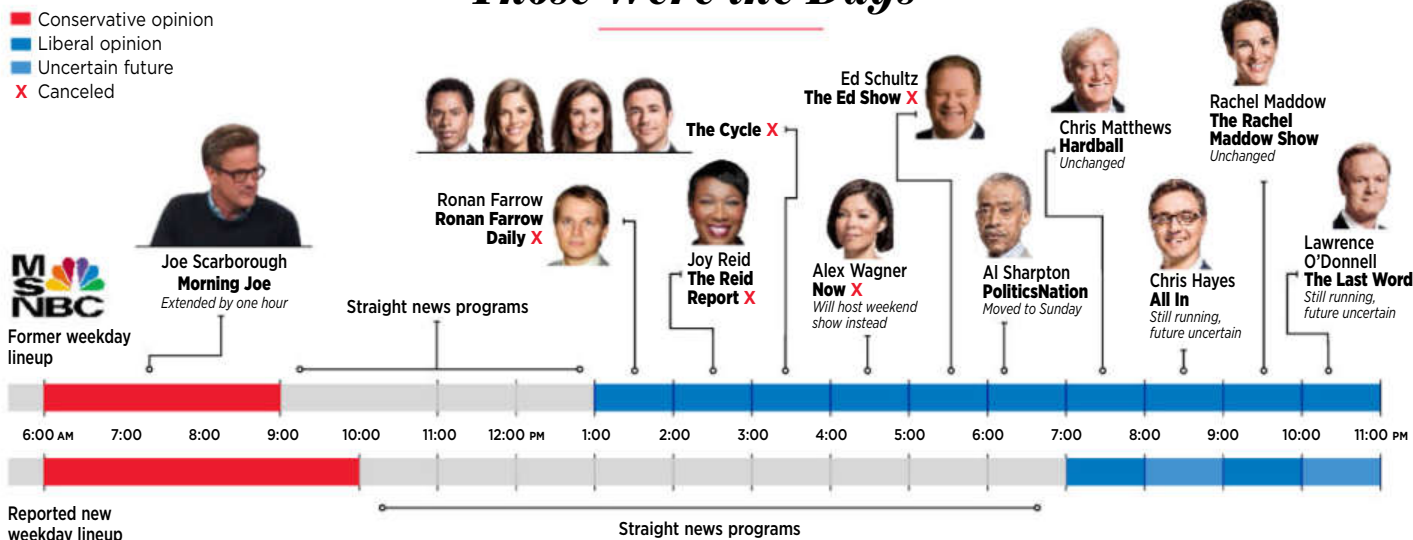
For now, it looks like MSNBC's weekends will remain a den of liberal iniquity. Melissa Harris-Perry is expected to keep her show, and Sharpton has his Sunday hour. The election-savvy Steve Kornacki will pinch-hit for Todd on Mondays and deliver more political coverage throughout the week, and Alex Wagner will host a new weekend show in his *Up* time slot.

This means that on weekends, MSNBC will continue to feature a diverse group of hosts, though they've nearly vanished from the rest of the cable network's schedule. MSNBC's weekday and prime-time hosts had been the most racially diverse in the business. But now, out of the network's 16-plus hours of programming a day, only two are led by people of color: José Diaz-Balart and Tamron Hall. Maybe MSNBC plans to fix that when it fills Sharpton's 6 PM slot, but for now the weekdays are looking awfully white.

OK, THAT'S ALL A HUGE SHAKE-UP, BUT IN ITSELF it's no putsch. After all, MSNBC has had straight-news daytime lineups before while running the lefty Maddow and Keith Olbermann at night. It's true that Hayes and O'Donnell are "under the microscope," an MSNBC insider told me, but "not in the service of getting away from a progressive" sensibility. "MSNBC has carved out an important space in terms of its perspective and opinion; it's unique, and we plan on continuing that for prime time," this person said, adding that if Hayes and O'Donnell are booted, their replacements will be "in their vein."

You want proof? Not only are the suits keeping Maddow, who pulls MSNBC's highest numbers (she often beats Anderson Cooper on CNN, although Fox's Megyn Kelly crushes them both), but they won't rule out bring-

Those Were the Days



ing back Olbermann. “I’ve heard plenty of people I know to be credible who say that Andy would be open to it, given the right conditions,” a different MSNBC insider told me. Of course, since the “right conditions” might never materialize, any talk of Olbermann’s return could be a faint. But the point is that MSNBC wants big names with ratings punch, and being a lib is not necessarily a problem.

“I don’t think Andy or anyone else in the corporation has a problem with high-rated liberal content,” my source said. The issue is rather the overall impact of remaking MSNBC in NBC’s image. “The message from the top is that NBC and MSNBC share one set of values—as of today. If that’s the guideline,” the source added, “that sets a different tone.”

Mainstream news standards, which turn on he-said/she-said attempts at “balance,” can eclipse the truth. But MSNBC’s he-opined/she-opined standards, especially in daytime, had become boring: one uninspired if liberal show after another, all of them indistinguishable, featuring the same stories, the same guests, but different hosts. And, ultimately, boring hurts the left—it always has. Poor ratings don’t prove that progressive thought is unpopular, just that MSNBC had become predictable. Function followed format, and the format was flat.

This wasn’t inevitable. In fact, one of MSNBC’s most popular shows was born by cracking open the formula. *Up With Chris Hayes* debuted in September 2011, offering two hours of nuanced, complex, and often surprising political talk every Saturday and Sunday morning. *The New York Times* called Hayes “Generation Y’s wonk prince of the morning political talk-show circuit.” Hayes, *The Nation*’s editor at large, created an exciting new habitat: He brought on academics, little-known activists, and still-lesser-known “regular” people affected by DC policies. He told his guests, “The first and foremost important rule of the show: We’re not on television—no talking points, no sound bites.”

Ratings were good, and social media even better. MSNBC president Phil Griffin was so happy with *Up* that, in February 2012, he added Melissa Harris-Perry (then a *Nation* columnist) to the weekend, and a year later moved Hayes to the showcase 8 PM slot (at which point Kornacki took over

A whole world of more or less progressive TV news has emerged—streaming, on demand, on mobile.



as the host of *Up*).

Sadly, that’s when the straitjacket of the one-hour format began to tighten. Hayes continues to push beyond talking points in his prime-time show (*All In* was MSNBC’s only show to win an Emmy this year), but too often the whole presentation feels rushed.

Still, with *Up*, Hayes—as well as Maddow, who busts conventions in other ways, like starting her show with uninterrupted, 18-minute-long stories—proves that progressives can thrive on cable news. The MSNBC overhaul doesn’t mean that lefty politics can’t survive in mass media, but what it does indicate is that new ideas and formats need to come from a new generation of producers who can take us beyond cable’s Big Three.

IN FACT, OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS, A WHOLE world of more or less progressive TV news has emerged—streaming, on demand, on mobile, and, increasingly, on cable TV itself. Vice News, Fusion, and Free Speech TV are available on cable and satellite, as are Al Jazeera America and Russia Today.

As for web TV, HuffPost Live now streams eight hours of original programming a day. Cenk Uygur’s nightly show *The Young Turks* is one of the most-watched online news shows in the world, having racked up more than 2 billion views on YouTube. Even MSNBC is producing its own digital alt-news channel, the assertively lowercased shift by msnbc.

The flurry of news sources is part of a larger, perhaps counterintuitive, wave of digital media rushing to produce old-media TV fare. It’s a trend that Michael Wolff captures in the title of his new book, *Television Is the New Television: The Unexpected Triumph of Old Media in the Digital Age*. Media companies don’t want to bet on one platform to the exclusion of others. As Wade Beckett, Fusion’s chief programming officer, told me: “The opportunity for us is that we are seeing a lot of activity from digital-media companies trying to get on TV, and legacy-media companies trying to buy a way into grow-

ing digital audiences.”

With a few exceptions, most of these news sources aim dead-on at young demographics (or, as a friend of mine calls it, “news with tattoos”). We’re not talking about the traditionally coveted 25-to-54 “demo,” but about the even more coveted millennials, loosely defined as between the ages of 18 and 34. (The median age for Fox viewers is 68; for MSNBC, 61; CNN is break-dancing at 58.)

These newer outlets aren’t often explicitly political. Few are as obsessed with Beltway or horse-race politics (or plane crashes) as CNN, FOX, and MSNBC. Their progressivism tends to be more embedded in their emphasis on activism, diversity, and environmental issues, and in deep-dig cultural reporting.

Or, in the case of Vice, in a dude-against-the-machine ethos.

VICE NEWS IS MAKING THE MOST AMBITIOUS ENTRY into TV news. Before the end of the year, it expects to launch a daily half-hour newscast on HBO, as well as on the streaming service HBO Now. That’s in addition to expanding its Emmy-winning weekly HBO series from 14 to 35 episodes a year through 2018.

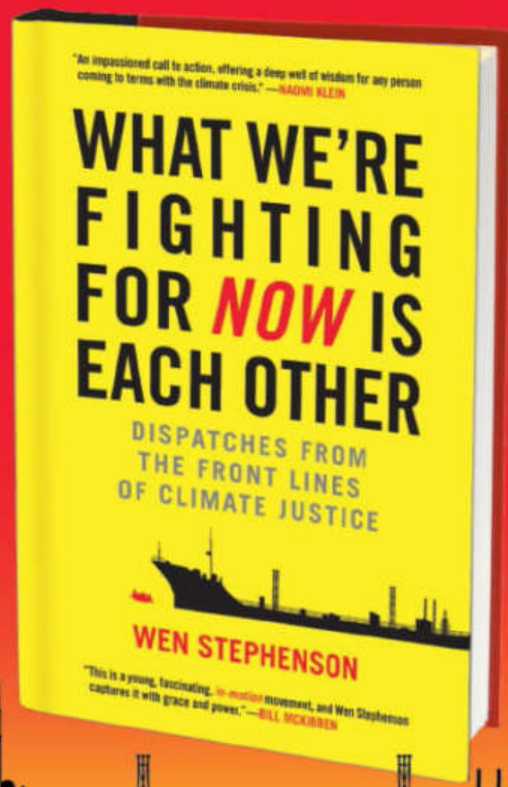
Under the headline “HBO-Vice Deal Should Scare the S*** Out of TV News,” *Variety* co-editor-in-chief Andrew Wallenstein calls the daily newscast “groundbreaking.” Vice’s deeply immersive, sneakers-on-the-ground style of reporting could, Wallenstein writes, “reinvigorate the whole notion of being a news brand, and make it relevant to younger audiences in a way that’s not just commercially viable but truly vital to a democracy dependent on an informed citizenry.”

Whew. Those are big expectations, even for Vice’s gonzo co-founder Shane Smith. The late, great media critic David Carr once thought Smith’s promises that Vice News would become “the next CNN” and “the next MTV” were “outrageous.” By 2014, however, Carr allowed that those claims “are becoming truer every passing day.” Citing a Peabody Award-winning series, *The Islamic State*, and Simon Ostrovsky’s “remarkable dispatches” from Ukraine, Carr wrote, “I’m just glad that someone’s willing to do the important work of bearing witness, the kind that can get you killed if something goes wrong.” (In August, Turkish authorities arrested three Vice journalists, charging them with aiding terrorists. The two British journalists, Jake Hanrahan and Philip Pendlebury, were released last month; Mohammed Ismael Rasool, an Iraqi journalist based in Turkey, is still being held.)

Fusion, a cable and digital network launched almost two years ago, is still reaching for Vice’s moxie. The original idea behind Fusion, jointly owned by Univision and ABC, was to attract young Latinos whose first language is English. But finding that focus too constricting, Fusion soon branched out to target all millennials—a generation so vast and diverse (its 83 million members far exceed the boomers’ 75.4 million) that, as *The New York Times* wrote in a piece about Fusion’s struggles, its members “sometimes seem united only in the dreams of marketers.” Programming chief Beckett acknowledges that the network is “still in an awareness-building stage.”

Fusion TV does have a powerful draw: Univision’s immensely popular Jorge Ramos. In his first English-language newscast, he hosts Fusion’s weekly *America With Jorge Ramos*. Who can forget that Donald Trump recently had him physically removed from a news conference, telling Ramos (who holds dual Mexican/US citizenship), “Go back to Univision”?

But most of Fusion’s news coverage comes via investigative



WHAT WE'RE FIGHTING FOR *NOW* IS EACH OTHER
DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONT LINES OF CLIMATE JUSTICE
WEN STEPHENSON

THE NATION CONTRIBUTING WRITER
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documentaries (like the Emmy-nominated *Pimp City*, on sex trafficking in the United States). Weekly series include *The Cannabusiness Report* and *Drug Wars*. Fusion has won one GLAAD award and was nominated for another for its reporting on LGBT issues. “Fusion,” says Beckett, “is hell-bent on standing up for individuality and diversity in today’s America by telling under-reported stories.”

In a promo for her news and culture talk show *Come Here and Say That*, Alicia Menendez, formerly of HuffPost Live (and the daughter of Senator Robert Menendez), both enacted and spoofed the industry obsession with the millennial market. “Upper management asked me to do a promo and say how frequently I use Twitter and Instagram,” she said. “I’m in your pants whenever you want.” Of course, she meant she’s on the smartphone in your pocket, but the sex and devices and rock-and-roll point is made.

Probably the most social-media-ized of the alt-newscasts is HuffPost Live. Remarkably, it had hosted some 28,000 guests from more than 100 countries as of April. It’s done this, co-creator Roy Sekoff tells me, by upending the sort of dull talk-show conventions that MSNBC’s liberal dayside had embraced. With Skype and Google Hangout, “we redefined what an expert is. If you have skin in the game, you’re an expert.” Instead of flipping through a “golden Rolodex,” he says, “we have our people scour social media and ask, ‘Would you like to come on and expand on that?’”

Sekoff has put his finger on the stifling cable formats that are turning off younger viewers, not to mention older ones like me. “They literally get the same five people” to talk Trump or the Iran deal or China, Sekoff complains. “We don’t do that.”

HuffPost Live is also breaking convention by allowing shows to run longer if the conversation gets interesting and also by rotating hosts. “We’re not personality-driven,” Sekoff says. And while that doesn’t always make for compelling viewing, it does seem to be working by at least one measure: HuffPost Live, Sekoff says, is getting 100 million video views a month.

THIS SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE, BUT MOST of the news channels mentioned here are owned by enormous media corporations. Rupert Murdoch has a 5 percent stake in Vice, while the Disney- and Hearst-owned A&E has another 10 percent. Fusion’s ABC co-parent is also owned by Disney. Both Fusion and Vice have run up against their corporate grandparents’ strictures. According to *The New York Times*, Disney put Fusion “on notice” to avoid stories that could offend consumers—like those based on hacked e-mails from Sony. In negotiations with Vice, the *Times* wrote, Disney and Hearst insisted on a clause protecting them “in the event that Vice content



Joe Scarborough’s show is getting another hour in MSNBC’s overhaul.



“We’re not owned by a billionaire or a corporation. We are unbought.”

—Ron Williams, FSTV executive director

‘embarrasses Hearst or Disney in any way.’”

You also have to wonder how much net-neutrality champion Huffington Post will champ on now that it’s been bought by Verizon, one of the leading neutrality opponents. Same question goes for all of the news properties owned by media companies, including the Comcast-owned MSNBC, which has not been vigorously covering net neutrality.

This is one thing that sets Free Speech TV apart. “We’re not owned by a billionaire, a corporation, or a government. We are unbought and uncompromised in our ability to present a progressive view of the world,” says FSTV executive director Ron Williams.

Less millennial-centric than Vice or Fusion, the two-decade-old FSTV grew the old-fashioned way: by televising radio talk shows and gradually upping the visuals. So you can watch *Democracy Now* with Amy Goodman, shows with former Current TV hosts Stephanie Miller and Bill Press, and *Ring of Fire* with Mike Papantonio, Bobby Kennedy Jr., and Sam Seder. FSTV is trying to raise the funds to bring on Elon James White’s web series *This Week in Blackness* every weekday. And Thom Hartmann’s “Brunch With Bernie” segment has been airing for years, long before Sanders’s presidential bid.

Williams knows that you may not be aware of any of this. Up until recently, he says, “We didn’t market ourselves so well.” With 14 hours a day of live (or “near-live”) content, both on TV and streaming, FSTV outdoes HuffPost Live’s eight hours. But while the network is in 40 million homes, thanks largely to satellite providers DirecTV and Dish, it doesn’t yet have its own channel on a big-time cable provider.

For all its shortcomings, MSNBC remains the closest thing we have to a daily, hour-by-hour counterweight to Fox News. Vice, Fusion, and HuffPost Live are not going to become the Anti-Fox; they lack the motivation of a direct competitor. You need to be on the same stage—literally the same “platform”—of big, bold, mass-market commercial TV to duke it out with

Fox News.

Take the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Media Matters surveyed the major news networks (almost all owned by companies that lobbied for the TPP) from August 1, 2013, to May 10, 2015, and found that on cable, only MSNBC mentioned the TPP with any frequency: 124 times, compared with Fox’s 12 and the Time Warner-owned CNN’s mere two. Of those 124 mentions, the overwhelming majority (103) came from the now-canceled *Ed Show*.

“People are concerned about what the brand is becoming,” one of the MSNBC insiders tells me. “Is there space to be against the war, not simply skeptical of it in a he-said/she-said way?”

Although MSNBC never was or could be as dogged a Fox-fighter as, say, Jon Stewart, it’s basically what progressives have on daily cable. Money, ratings, and popularity are what the media’s made of. But MSNBC, at its best, is also attempting something deeper: trying to dig us out from under what Stewart calls “Bullshit Mountain.” MSNBC has the shovels; it needs to hold on to its will.



KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL / THE NATION'S EDITOR & PUBLISHER



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conversation on
how progressives
are shaping
Election 2016

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(continued from page 2)

at legislative hearings, research, visits to county magistrates, door-to-door information distribution, testimonies, collection of petition signatures—all conducted by various members of the coalition—finally resulted in the company withdrawing its plans. The campaign exemplified what grassroots cooperation can achieve.

CECILY JONES, S.L.
NERINX, KY.

Bern, Baby, Bern

Eric Alterman devoted 10 column inches to making a pretty good case for Bernie Sanders for president ["Inequality in Campaign Mode," Sept. 29/Oct. 5]. Yet he concluded that Sanders will not win the Democratic nomination, much less the election, and can only put heat on the likely nominee to follow his lead by addressing the concerns of the majority of voters. Only? Those who don't feel the Bern are talking long shot or less; those who do are on the streets, and it's working.

KEN SANDIN
ROCKVILLE, MD.

Fuzzy Math?

"Relax or Collapse" [Sept. 14/21] informs us that "each week, the average American puts in 41 hours per week" and that "the average workweek in the US is nearly a whole workday longer than 40 hours." Inquiring minds want to know how both statements can be true at once.

ROSS BOYLAN
SAN FRANCISCO

Bryce Covert Replies

The discrepancy comes from using two different data sources looking at different questions. The 47-hour-workweek figure—that is, the one that's the basis for the claim that the average workweek is nearly a

whole workday longer than 40 hours—comes from a poll of American workers conducted by Gallup, which asked them how much time they put in at work, on average. The 41-hour-workweek figure comes from an international comparison based on a time-use survey, which may also have been adjusted to smooth out the data between countries. It can be complicated to accurately measure the workweek and make comparisons with those other countries, but the data overwhelmingly show that we put in far more hours here than most of our peers in the developed world.

BRYCE COVERT
NEW YORK CITY

Greider the Great

Thank you for publishing William Greider. His work always seems so right on. I've been enjoying his articles since the 1980s, including, most recently, "The Neocon Game" [Sept. 14/21]. Not long ago, I came across an article that Greider wrote in the June 30, 2003, issue of *The Nation* titled "Deflation." Here is a quote from the 12-year-old piece: "Rescuing the big boys while allowing others to drown has been the conventional approach in recent decades, including the banking bailouts engineered by the Fed." A wise man. I wish he had a bigger following among US policy-makers.

JIM SCHEIDT
MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.

Correction

In the Oct. 12 issue, the bio for Dorothy Samuels ["Wrong on Gun Rights"] mistakenly states that she served on the *New York Times* editorial board from 1984 to 2014; in fact, her tenure there continued until March 2015.

Books & the Arts.

On the Move

by JAMES LONGENBACH

A girl grows up in a working-class family in New Jersey, the eldest of four children. Her mother is a waitress, her father works nights. The girl collects things, pebbles, marbles, charms—things that speak to her because of where she found them. She reads a lot of books. At the Philadelphia bus depot, she finds a book called *Illuminations*, which she pockets because she was attracted to the author's face. Why was a copy of Arthur Rimbaud's *Illuminations* waiting for her at the bus depot?

In 1967, when she drops out of college and moves to Brooklyn, she meets a beautiful boy. Like her, he feels destined to be an artist. But while she draws a little, writes a little, occasionally sings, the boy is focused, convinced that their artistic yearnings are not childish dreams. The boy and the girl promise always to take care of each other. She keeps a lock of his hair, a box of letters, a goatskin tambourine, a vial of his ashes.

"In 1978 I came into a little money and was able to pay a security deposit toward the lease of a one-story building on East Tenth Street," writes Patti Smith in *M Train*, the sequel to her National Book Award-winning memoir *Just Kids*. She doesn't say so, but she came into a little money because in 1978 her song "Because the Night" (written with Bruce Springsteen and produced by Jimmy Iovine) became a hit single. Smith's first album, the groundbreaking *Horses*, had appeared in 1975: Its now-iconic cover image—Smith with a black jacket tossed over her shoulder, Sinatra-style—was shot by the boy who grew up to be the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. The girl who found Rimbaud in the bus depot grew up to be named a Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture.

Like Patti Smith's life, *M Train* feels guided simultaneously by determination and serendipity. It's hard to gauge Smith's attitude when she says that in 1978 she "came into a little money," but I don't think she means to be coy. She knows who she



Patti Smith.

became, and she knows that we know. But she's not very interested in talking about that person. Mostly she's interested in things—little talismanic things and, by extension, other things, other people. This is what makes her previous memoir, *Just Kids*, so poignant, so lacking in the narcissism endemic even to the best of memoirs: The story of her life is indescribable except inasmuch as it is also Mapplethorpe's story. "When I look at it now," says Smith of the cover of *Horses*, "I never see me. I see us."

M Train perpetuates this method, except that the cast of characters is much larger, each chapter set in motion by a little Proustian moment that provokes an unpredictable chain of memory and observation, one thing talking to another. To the degree that we're led to imagine the life of the book's author, that life feels familiar, even ordinary, the life of a woman who was once a dreamy

M Train

By Patti Smith.

Knopf. 253 pages. \$25.

little girl in New Jersey. But simultaneously, the life feels exotic, extraordinary, the life of a woman who has visited places and seen things that, without her having written about them, we would never imagine.

She looks around a room. What does she see?

Things beyond socks or glasses: Kevin Shields's EBow, a snapshot of a sleepy-faced Fred, a Burmese offering bowl, Margot Fonteyn's ballet slippers, a misshapen clay giraffe formed by my daughter's hands. I pause before my father's chair.

Reading these sentences, we feel Smith pause at the chair because her syntax shifts: The

James Longenbach's most recent books are *The Iron Key* (Norton) and *The Virtues of Poetry* (Graywolf).

first person enters, followed by the first active verb—I pause. Prior to this moment, things have followed one another as if of their own accord. Now the mind enters the proceedings, but the syntax returns to the same kind of list-like accumulation of things:

My father sat at his desk, in this chair, for decades, writing checks, filling out tax forms, and working fervently on his own system for handicapping horses. Bundles of *The Morning Telegraph* were stacked against the wall. A journal wrapped in jeweler's cloth, noting wins and losses from imaginary bets, kept in the left-hand drawer.

Parallel phrases tumble on top of each other ("writing checks," "filling out tax forms," "working fervently"); then active verbs fall away again, allowing noun phrases to nestle side by side as if they were themselves the things she is no longer observing in the room around her but remembering from the past ("Bundles of *The Morning Telegraph*"; "A journal wrapped in jeweler's cloth").

Then the mind returns: "When he died I inherited his desk and chair." But not for long:

Inside the desk was a cigar box containing canceled checks, nail clippers, a broken Timex watch, and a yellowed newspaper cutting of my beaming self in 1959, being awarded third prize in a national safety-poster contest.

This is how the life of Patti Smith enters the world of *M Train*, which is always on the move: not as narrated event (in 1959, *I was awarded third prize*; in 1978, *I had a hit single*), but as the by-product of her animating dialogue with the things that bear the lives of people she loves, people she's lost: her parents, her brother, her husband; Jean Genet, Sylvia Plath, Enid Meadowcroft (author of *The Story of Davy Crockett*). The conversation is at turns poignant, whimsical, stern, but it is always deeply respectful of the otherness of things, and, as a result, it is seductively dry-eyed, especially at its moments of greatest emotional intensity. "You should sit on me," says her father's chair to her, but Smith can't bring herself to do so: "We were never allowed to sit at my father's desk, so I don't use his chair, just keep it near."

Smith the writer is well-known as both a musician and a visual artist, but writing has always lain at the center of her achievement; her songs contain words, sometimes lots of words, and her drawings are often made of words, long strings of minuscule, almost indecipherable script. But it's one thing to write a great rock-

and-roll lyric and another thing to write a book like *M Train*. The line "Wop bop a loo bop a lop bam boom," from Little Richard's "Tutti-Frutti," is a great line in a song, but would you describe it as great writing? Context is all. Coming at the end of *King Lear*, the line "Never, never, never, never, never" is one of the most thrilling pentameters that Shakespeare ever wrote, but outside of the context of the play, how would you say it's any good? On *Horses*, in the middle of her revved-up cover of "Land of a Thousand Dances," Smith shouts, "Go Rimbaud, go Rimbaud!" When I first listened to the song in 1975, I thought she was saying, "Go ram bow, go ram bow." That was enough.

Throughout the later '70s, Smith often opened her concerts by reciting a prose-poem called "Babelogue"; her album *Easter*, released in 1978, features a recording of her reciting the poem over Lenny Kaye's guitar, and the poem also appears in *Babel*, a book published in the same year:

i haven't fucked w/ the past but i've fucked plenty w/ the future. over the silk of skin are scars from the splinters of stages and walls i've caressed. each bolt of wood, like the log of helen, was my pleasure. i would measure the success of a night by the amount of piss and seed i could exude over the columns that nestled the P/A. some nights i'd surprise everybody by snapping on a skirt of green net sewed over w/ flat metallic circles which dangled and flashed. the lights were violet and white.

What kind of writing is this? Like a lot of people, I can attest to the fact that listening to Smith recite this poem was completely thrilling. In the fall of 1978, after witnessing a focused yet almost chaotic performance in Hartford, Connecticut, I attended a concert a week later in Providence, Rhode Island, a concert in which Smith became so dissatisfied with her own performance that she stopped the band and walked off the stage. This also was thrilling. Especially if you were a kid with artistic yearnings, she gave you permission to fail, and to do it in public, without apology.

But Smith's early poetry, made for performance, is a different kind of writing than the kind she's offering in her recent memoirs or the kind that distinguishes the lyrics of her 2012 album *Banga* (which strikes this fan of four decades as one of her best). And while the prose of *M Train* is a distinguished achievement in itself, I'm also moved by the way in which, over the decades, Smith

has become scrupulously attentive to the demands that context makes on the act of writing. Most rock-and-roll singers who write books do not write crafted sentences, even though they've written brilliant song lyrics; most visual artists do not write books at all. The opening line of the Rolling Stones's "Honky Tonk Women" ("I met a gin-soaked barroom queen in Memphis") is an iambic-pentameter line, one whose rhythm Shakespeare might have coveted, but nobody would expect Mick Jagger and Keith Richards to write *King Lear*.

You can witness the unapologetic Smith in the act of becoming the writer she is today in a little memoir (first published by a small press in 1992 and reissued by New Directions in 2011) called *Woolgathering*. At first, its sentences sound more like *Babel* than *M Train*, more like sentences to be performed out loud than savored in private:

The cruel intensity of this process can produce a thing of beauty but oftentimes just a tear in the shimmering from which to wrest and wriggle. A spine of rope sliding an arena more remote and dazzling than ever.

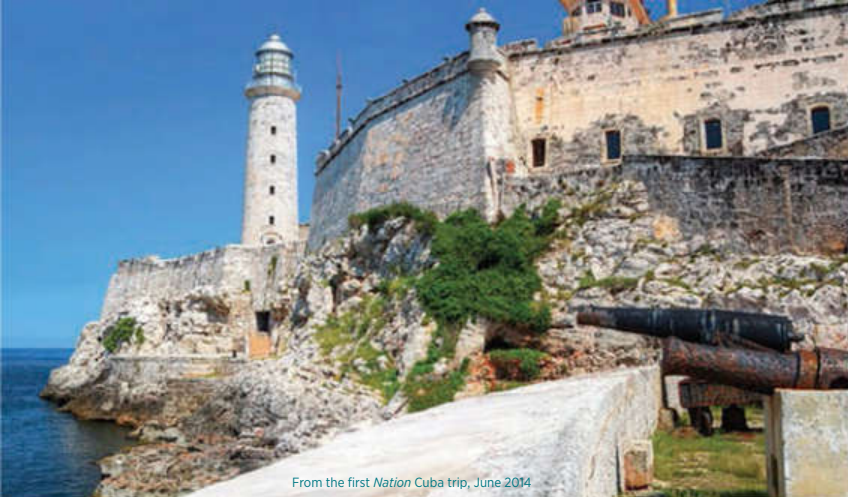
But as you turn the pages of *Woolgathering*, you can feel the sentences change to the degree that Smith attempts not to embody her thinking in a verbal stream of consciousness but to describe a sequence of things that provoke her thinking.

This is an account of the last day she spent with a beloved dog named Bambi:

It was in my mind to take her to all the places we loved. We would take one last walk to Red Clay Mountain and stop awhile by Rainbow Creek. I had a peanut butter sandwich wrapped in wax paper and some dog biscuits. I sat with Bambi at my feet and surveyed my domain. She would not eat her treats. She knows, I thought.

Here, Smith hasn't yet figured out how to make her syntax itself embody the accumulation of telltale things, as she does so effortlessly in *M Train*, but that impulse is nonetheless driving the prose: peanut butter sandwich, Rainbow Creek, Red Clay Mountain. The author of *M Train* wouldn't need to say, "It was in my mind to take her to all the places we loved," but you would understand this palpably to be the case.

Unlike *Woolgathering*, *M Train* is written from a perspective that feels posthumous. After the release of the album *Wave* in



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YOUR HOSTS

Sujatha Fernandes



Sujatha Fernandes is a professor of sociology at Queens College and the CUNY Graduate Center. Her first book, *Cuba Represent!*, looks at the forms of cultural struggle that arose in post-Soviet Cuban society. Her most recent book, *Close to the Edge*, grapples with questions of global voices and local critiques in hip-hop, and the rage that underlies both. Fernandes has been published in both academic journals and popular forums, including *The Nation*, *The New York Times*, *American Prospect*, and *Dissent*.

Charles Bittner



For almost two decades, Charles Bittner has served as *The Nation's* academic liaison, representing the magazine and organizing panels at academic conferences throughout the country. He has hosted four previous *Nation* trips to Cuba and teaches in the sociology department at St. John's University.

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1979, Smith moved to Detroit with her new husband, Fred “Sonic” Smith (the guitarist from the MC5). For a decade, they raised two children, they refurbished a boat; there was a scraggly pear tree in the yard. Then Mapplethorpe died of AIDS in 1989. Fred Smith died unexpectedly of a heart attack five years later, her brother of a stroke just a month after that, and in 1996 Smith moved back to New York. She began recording and exhibiting regularly again; it was a productive, grief-fueled time.

“Now I have no trees,” says Smith of her present self in *M Train*; “there is no crib or clothesline.” At moments like this, she sounds like almost any devoted parent in late middle age. And much of *M Train* is given over to accounts of the little rituals in the daily life of a woman living alone in the Village; if she finds someone sitting at her favorite table in her favorite café, a café whose closing she mourns throughout the book, she waits in the bathroom until the interloper leaves.

She also waits for something to come her way, and because Smith is not just any woman living in the Village, things come: an invitation to address a meeting of the Continental Drift Club in Berlin, an invitation to speak at the home of Frida Kahlo. But in Berlin, she is ridiculed (“This isn’t science, it’s poetry!”), and in Mexico, she falls violently ill. Travel, as the title of *M Train* suggests, is what Smith lives for, but *M* stands for *mental*: mental travel, mental train.

She drinks a cup of coffee. She remembers her mother brewing coffee in a percolator, waiting by the stove in her blue-flowered housecoat. In Detroit, because there were no nearby cafés, Smith brewed coffee too. But on Saturday mornings, she would walk to the local 7-Eleven for a large black coffee and a glazed doughnut. Then she would sit behind a little whitewashed bait-and-tackle shop:

To me it looked like Tangier, though I had never been there. I sat on the ground in the corner surrounded by low white walls, shelving real time, free to rove the smooth bridge connecting past and present. My Morocco. I followed whatever train I wanted. I wrote without writing—of genies and hustlers and mythic travelers, my *vagabondia*. Then I would walk back home, happily satisfied, and resume my daily tasks. Even now, having at last been to Tangier, my spot behind the bait store seems the true Morocco in my memory.

Coffee, her mother, Michigan, Morocco: Smith cherishes the dependably stable space

she’s crafted for herself in the Village, but her mind is always on the move. “By the time I got back to New York I had forgotten why I’d left,” she says of the trip to Berlin, and the mental itineraries of *M Train* feel similarly linear, one thing leading inevitably to another thing, each one lovingly fondled, cataloged, preserved. Then it’s time to feed the cats, time to brew the coffee.

Some things, however, are too painful. She opens her desk. She removes a small metal box: three fishing lures, one made of purple transparent rubber, like a Juicy Fruit. “Hello, Curly,” she says to the lure, speaking to the object that speaks to her, remembering how she and Fred would go fishing on Lake Ann in northern Michigan, how Fred taught her to cast, how he gave her “a portable Shakespeare rod whose parts fit like arrows in a carrying case shaped like a quiver.” The satisfaction Smith takes in describing the rod, word by word, feels like the satisfaction she took in putting it together, taking it apart. “We want things we cannot have,” she laments, and out tumble more things:

I want to hear my mother’s voice. I want to see my children as children. Hands small, feet swift. Everything changes. Boy grown, father dead, daughter taller than me, weeping from a bad dream. Please stay forever, I say to the things I know. Don’t go. Don’t grow.

Once again, the power of this passage is due not to the wisdom as such but to its nearly verbless, list-like accumulation of things, the rhythm progressing from punchy pairs of monosyllabic words (“Hands small, feet swift”) to the slight lilt of words containing unstressed syllables (“Everything changes”) to the amplitude of a completed clause (“Please stay forever, I say to the things I know”), before returning to the punchy, two-beat rhythm with which it began: “Don’t go. Don’t grow.” This writing is moving because it moves.

When I was a teenager in the ’70s, Patti Smith showed me a way of being serious about art that didn’t feel incompatible with being a teenager. Because of her, I read Rimbaud: The big doors to the barn stood open and ready. Never did I imagine that Patti Smith would continue to show me how a life might profitably be lived four decades later. The punk chanteuse has become the irresistible siren of middle age, and she has done so not by surviving but by refusing to settle for the glamour of past accomplishment. Except for what she will do next, *M Train* is the most beautiful thing she’s ever made. ■



Jonathan Franzen.

Politics as Pathology

by JON BASKIN

It's been almost two decades since Jonathan Franzen confessed in print to his "despair about the American novel." In "Perchance to Dream," the long, almost perversely ambitious essay that appeared in the April 1996 issue of *Harper's Magazine*, Franzen explored a variety of issues: the fate of fiction in an age of distraction; the anthropology of readers and writers; the depressive tendencies of Jonathan Franzen. But the question of how Franzen might overcome his despair rested on something else, which was whether he could resolve the conflict he felt between his inclination to write aesthetically and politically challenging fiction in the mold of Thomas Pynchon or Don DeLillo, and his desire to "lose" himself in the intimate lives of his characters, in the manner of Jane Smiley or John Irving.

At the time, Franzen was the author of two "culturally engaged" novels that the culture had, in his opinion, politely declined to engage. The enormous popular and critical success of Franzen's two mid-career novels *The Corrections* (2001) and *Freedom* (2010),

which lifted their author out of relative obscurity and onto the cover of *Time*, has often been attributed to his having managed to write the kind of "big social novel" that had seemed on the brink of extinction. By his own admission, Franzen has fussed less over his prose style since publishing *The Corrections*, a decision whose consequences are evident in the long stretches of graceless writing in *Freedom* and his new novel, *Purity*. But a shortage of aesthetic gratification is a small price to pay if you believe, as do the writer's fans, that Franzen has succeeded in combining the entertaining domestic realism of the great Victorian novelists with an accessible political commentary that captures some portion of the "agony," as the critic Mark Greif said in regard to *Freedom*, of being a liberal in our time.

Franzen's novels do communicate something agonizing about being a liberal today. But what? One clue might be found in the introduction to his essay collection *How to Be Alone* (2002), where Franzen contends that the *Harper's* essay, far from announcing his intention to write a "big social novel," was actually about him "abandoning" his sense of social responsibility as a novelist and "learning to write fiction for the fun and entertainment of

it." The essay, as Franzen himself admits, occasionally defies its author's characterization of it, but his revisionist reading is nevertheless instructive when attempting to characterize what Franzen has written since. In the end, the critical swoon over *The Corrections*, a very good novel about an unhappy Midwestern family, and *Freedom*, a very bad novel about an unhappy Midwestern family, and especially the presumption that these are, in any meaningful sense, political novels, may say less about the books themselves than it does about our prevailing cultural assumptions regarding the nature of political participation.

There are contemporary novelists—for example, Norman Rush and Elena Ferrante—who would not believe it possible to write a realistic or even "entertaining" work of fiction without engaging what Franzen, in "Perchance to Dream," called the "bigger social picture." It is not always clear that Franzen believes it is possible either, and his recent novels are hardly devoid of political and social commentary. But they leave little doubt as to where he stands on the relative importance of the political and the personal. Franzen's characters, just like many of his readers, are earnest and sometimes preoccupied with their public lives, but they are consumed by their private ones. Even and perhaps especially when they become impassioned about liberal causes, politics remains oddly hypothetical to them, alternately a Garden of Eden or a haunted house, and in either case a place that they are destined, like their author, to abandon.

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Purity, like Franzen's previous four novels, is organized around an unhappy family—actually, in this case, three unhappy families. The book's chief protagonist is Purity Tyler, known to her friends as "Pip," whom we first meet as a recent college graduate attempting to pay down her student debt while working in a dead-end job at a renewable-energy company in Oakland. Although the book opens by establishing Pip's loving if complicated relationship with her mother, Anabel, who lives as a recluse in a vaguely Pynchonesque Santa Cruz, it is driven by her search for her father, whose identity has been kept from her since birth. Following what looks like a chance encounter with a German peace activist, Pip decides to leave Oakland to become an intern for the "Sunlight Project"—an online clearinghouse of secrets similar to WikiLeaks, with headquarters in the Bolivian mountains. (Hardly anything turns out to be by chance in *Purity*; the book is structured, like the Dickens novel from which its protagonist's nickname has been plucked, around a series of dramatic reveals.) She tells her mother that she is going because she thinks the project's founder, Andreas Wolf, can help her find her father.

The second section of *Purity* is devoted to the story of Andreas's unhappy childhood in Soviet-era East Berlin. He is ostensibly the son of a Communist-apparatchik father and a nymphomaniacal mother, and Andreas's disgust with his upbringing—and some of his own actions in the course of it—is presented as inspiring his dedication to using the Internet to bring "sunlight" to the masses. Characteristically, though, we are told far more about the personal secrets Andreas wants to hide (largely having to do with the sexual appetite he has inherited from his mother) than about the political secrets he attempts to expose. Following a series of abortive attempts to seduce her, Andreas makes good on his promise to help Pip find her father—although she doesn't initially realize it—when he sends her back to America to spy on Tom Aberant, the editor of an independent investigative newspaper in Denver. The third unhappy family in the book is Tom's, which is described in another lengthy flashback, culminating in the editor's attempt to escape his childhood through an extremely unhappy marriage to Pip's mother.

The most compelling stretch of *Purity* is Tom's narration of his younger self's relationship with Anabel. It begins with his recounting of their early days of infatuation, interrupted only by a series of short-lived, but fateful, disagreements and culminating in a marriage proposal. As Anabel's artistic ambi-

Books Discussed in This Essay

Purity

By Jonathan Franzen.

Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 563 pp. \$28.

Jonathan Franzen

The Comedy of Rage.

By Philip Weinstein.

Bloomsbury. 230 pp. \$24.95.

tions (namely a hilariously doomed "body-filming" project) founder and she takes out her frustration on her more successful husband, Tom discovers, like generations of idealistic college-age lovers before him, that the "heaven of soul-merging was a hell." Out of pity and guilt, he remains in the relationship for years after realizing that he should leave, then finds himself powerless to resist Anabel's invitations to continue their argument long past the marriage's official expiration date. The debates begin over the phone and are followed by explosive meetings in person, spectacular back-and-forths of recrimination and regret, periods of estrangement, then the repetition of the cycle from the beginning. "All we ever argued about was nothing," Tom recalls. "As if by multiplying zero content by infinite talk we could make it stop being zero." Later, he adds:

Anabel refused to see that there was simply something broken about us, broken beyond repair and beyond assignment of blame. During our previous binge, we'd talked for nine hours nonstop, pausing only for bathroom breaks. I'd thought I'd finally succeeded in showing her that the only way out of our misery was to renounce each other and never communicate again; that nine-hour conversations were themselves the sickness that they were purportedly trying to cure. This was the version of us that she'd called me this morning to reject. But what was her version? Impossible to say. She was so morally sure of herself, moment by moment, that I perpetually had the feeling that we were getting somewhere; only afterward could I see that we'd been moving in a large, empty circle.

One gets a glimpse in such passages, as in the best family scenes of *The Corrections* or Franzen's 2006 memoir *The Discomfort Zone*, of the kind of caustic conversational novelist that he might become—a Robert Altman or Woody Allen of literary fiction—if he were

to accept his own advice in the *Harper's* essay and focus on what seems to interest him most: couples and families arguing with one another. Tom's observation about Anabel's moral self-certainty does link his relationship with Anabel to the larger themes of the book. Yet within the narrative of *Purity*, the scenes between them are almost entirely self-contained—and it's hard not to suspect that Franzen devised the entire (and often extremely creaky) machinery of the novel in order to produce them.

To the extent that Franzen has an argument to make in *Purity*, it is about the dangers of seeing the world as a binary opposition between purity and corruption. The present-day Tom and his current girlfriend, Leila Helou, another journalist, are meant to offer instructive counterexamples to the young Tom and Anabel. By comparison, Tom and Leila's relationship is less idealistic but more durable, an intimate demonstration of their professional commitment to balance and proportion. "The truth is somewhere in the tension between the two sides, and that's where the journalist is supposed to live," says Tom—advice meant to be a critique of extremisms of all kinds, including that of *Purity's* other moral absolutist, Andreas Wolf. In an interview with the *Columbia Journalism Review*, Leila contrasts the responsibility of the journalist with the blind zeal of what she calls "the leakers," like Andreas or Julian Assange, who "just spew." The leakers "have this savage naïveté," Leila observes, "like the kid who thinks adults are hypocrites for filtering what comes out of their mouths. Filtering isn't phoniness—it's civilization."

One cannot help but hear, in Leila's rueful acknowledgment that "The interesting people are always immoderate," an echo of Franzen's own discomfort with the praise heaped on his friend and fellow novelist David Foster Wallace—who, Franzen alleged in *The New Yorker* after Wallace's death, had connected with his readership by laying bare the "extremes of his own...dehumanizing moralism" and exposing his "childlike purity." The implication that Wallace wrote precisely the wrong kind of novels for his American audience can be justified, in Franzen's view, by the notion that the contemporary novel finds its purpose not in satiating our craving for moral absolutism, but in pushing back against the powerful cultural forces that idealize it. Experimental art like Wallace's, Franzen indicates, may be one of these forces, but he gives two others special attention in his new novel. The first is a political calculus that rewards ideological purity and self-righteousness over empathy and problem-solving; the second is

a reliance on digital forms of communication (e.g., Twitter and blogs) that inspire a juvenile flight from context and complexity.

Franzen's complaints about these phenomena are unlikely to strike many of his readers as new, nor does *Purity*, notwithstanding a remarkably labored comparison between the Internet and totalitarianism ("If you substituted networks for socialism, you got the Internet"—really?), offer a particularly convincing examination of them. And it is Franzen, for all his anguish over the "terrors of technocracy," who appears to endorse the deterministic idea that our fate hangs on our choice of social media. The conventionality of his arguments does not, however, render them ineffectual; judging from the early reviews of *Purity*, moreover, Franzen's concerns about what the critic Sam Tanenhaus calls the "false idolatry of the digital age" can hardly be dismissed as eccentric. And he is successful, I think, in compelling the reader to appreciate the virtues of Tom and Leila's unsexy moderation, as set against the more initially appealing charisma of Andreas and Anabel.

At the same time, it's worth asking whether *Purity* provides any more inspiring picture—beyond Tom and Leila's vague embrace of "truth"—of what a mature liberal's engagement with political life might look like. This is a question that could be asked of Franzen's fiction more generally, given how often his novels depict characters whose embrace of progressive causes proves to be nothing more than a passing phase. Late in *Purity*, when Pip's Aunt Cynthia tries to outrage her with stories of "the worldwide abdication of responsibility for climate change, the disappointments of Obama," Pip reports that she "did and didn't share her [aunt's] anger"; she is on her way to finding a good boyfriend, and with him the realization that, whatever she chose to do with her life, she "could never alter the world's shitty course." For readers familiar with Franzen's earlier work, this moment of wisdom recalls Walter Berglund's acknowledgment of his personal and political limitations at the end of *Freedom*, as well as the puncturing of Louis Holland's balloon of bitterness in the closing pages of *Strong Motion* (1992), Franzen's second novel. This wisdom consists in accepting that society will resist our most ardent attempts to reform it, and that, moreover, our mania to change the world is likely the product of issues that lie closer to home.

Franzen is not the first novelist to remind readers that the causes they choose to embrace as adults are watermarked by their

Who Talks Like That?

The Narrows is strips of yellow and jade,
Verrazano Bridge silver, horizontal lines,

here; and here, someone alone, afraid, crying,
sad, sunken eyes, emaciated body; and, here,

the speed of a slap, the strain under the skin;
and this murky and absurdly massive figure

bent over double under an unknown burden;
and this bandaged wound, smudged contours,

body and mind breached;
and I thought this,

waking early, looking out, the too magnificent
to be described unclouded sky, night still

in the west, the eastern horizon crimson,
melting into blue, light's solid pact being

forged without apotheosis, Governors Island
lashed by waves, where the two rivers meet.

Who talks like that? I talk like that. Blinding
point of light in which everything converges,

everything is revealed. Dense constellations
of abject suffering, hell-holes, hell-time,

all things associated with what is configured.
Light not only looked at, but the light we have

looked at with, in common with Byzantine
mosaics, iconic, chromatic, glowing, as if

caught by the sunlit sky, revised, added to, a separate
palette kept for each poem, in the present, a presence,

here, a man who watches the woman he loves
as she walks toward him, in Battery Park, in patches

of light, in the birch leaf green, the harbor
bright blue, in pockets of deep green shade.

LAWRENCE JOSEPH

biographies in more ways than they will ever know. We do not simply inherit our political beliefs from our parents, nor do we arrive at them after a disinterested accounting of pros and cons, as explainer websites like Vox and FiveThirtyEight would have it. But Franzen returns, again and again, to one particular story about the relationship between individual growth and political participation; according to this story, the achievement of maturity is accompanied by a withdrawal from the political to the personal. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this story shares much in common with the one Franzen has grown accustomed to telling about himself.

Heretofore related in bits and scraps in Franzen's essays and speeches, the major strands of that story have been woven together by Philip Weinstein in his new critical biography, *Jonathan Franzen: The Comedy of Rage*. It begins with a clever but callow student at Swarthmore College, obsessed with Thomas Pynchon, enraged by the degradation of the environment, and desperate to be the next consequential American novelist. In 1982, this ambitious young writer meets an equally self-serious coed (although she initially rejects his advances, the writer finally breaks through—according to a speech quoted by Weinstein—during a “deep, passionate conversation about an essay of Susan Sontag’s”); the two begin dating and, after graduating, set out to achieve literary immortality. By the late 1980s, however, both the young male writer's career and his marriage reach a stalemate. His two politically ambitious novels have failed to shatter America's thoughtless monoculture, while his marriage, built initially on the couple's talent for “deploring other people,” has turned in on itself. Here, from *The Discomfort Zone*, is how Franzen remembers his life circa 1989:

[W]e could no longer stand to be together for more than a few weeks, could no longer stand to see each other so unhappy.... We reacted to minor fights at breakfast by lying facedown on the floor of our respective rooms for hours at a time, waiting for acknowledgment of our pain. I wrote poisonous jeremiads to family members who I felt had slighted my wife, she presented me with handwritten fifteen- and twenty-page analyses of our condition; I was putting away a bottle of Maalox every week. It was clear to me that something was terribly wrong. And what was wrong, I

decided, was modern industrialized society's assault on the environment.

The tone of this recollection is characteristic of how the “mature” Franzen, a personage who emerged in the *Harper's* essay and has since developed in various autobiographical writings, would come to treat his benighted younger self. The young Franzen, implies the mature one, was quick to every kind of rage. He was selfish, solipsistic, and juvenile: Just look at him lying there on that floor like a baby, waiting for a woman to take pity on him. But instead of assuming responsibility for the mess he'd made of his personal life, the young Franzen projected his rage onto all sorts of people, places, and things, including “Boston, Boston drivers, the people at the lab where I worked, the computer at the lab, my family, [my wife's] family, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, the minimalist fiction writers then in vogue, and men who divorced their wives,” as he himself was about to do. According to the mature Franzen, even the young Franzen's rage about corporate America's assault on the environment—one of the main subjects of *Strong Motion*—was a by-product of his peevish immaturity and his sense that the world owed him some special dispensation.

But the young Franzen was not fated to remain forever young. Sometime in the mid-'90s, this “angry and theory-minded” man was able to escape his marriage and his rage, and ultimately to write *The Corrections*, the novel that would make him famous (and also, thanks to Oprah, infamous). In the biography, Weinstein largely accepts and reproduces Franzen's portrait of himself as a man who has lived his 20s twice, the first time as tragedy, the second time through his literary reproductions of them as farce. The death of Franzen's marriage, Weinstein argues, allowed for the birth of a new and considerably less angry man, a “comic genius” capable of teasing from his earlier life a sort of “Schulzian comedy” (after Charles Schulz, whose *Peanuts* comic strips Franzen loved as a child). Franzen, says Weinstein, had found the “humor...to accept what [he] cannot change,” a discovery that would be central to the lessons of *The Corrections* and *Freedom*. This conforms precisely to the self-diagnosis Franzen offers in his latest nonfiction book, *The Kraus Project* (2013), where he admits that the apocalypse he had seen evidence of on every street corner during his bitter 20s was simply an “element of the privileged person's anger at the world for disappointing him.” There is still some rage in Franzen's later novels, Weinstein admits, but it belongs to

his characters as opposed to the author; and it is always the product of the “refusal to accept the messiness not just of the world we inhabit, but also of our fault-ridden selves.”

The appeal of such a mythology is obvious: We would all like to grow up. Yet it is a truism of social life that the person lecturing you about having become an adult will often remain a howling infant in disguise. A conspicuous feature of Franzen's writing since *The Corrections*—and something Weinstein notices but makes little of—consists in the bizarre combination of the comic spirit with the rageful one, as if the mature Franzen has not so much supplanted the younger one as attempted, publicly and mostly unsuccessfully, to suffocate him. In *The Kraus Project*, the author's seemingly considered evaluations of his angry younger self contend awkwardly with blatant examples of his current angry self; he now sees his youthful rage against newspaper book reviewers as misplaced, he confesses at one point, just a page before launching into complementary diatribes about Internet bloggers and the apocalyptic evil signified by Amazon. (Jeff Bezos “may not be the Antichrist,” Franzen generously concedes, “but he surely looks like one of the Four Horsemen.”) Likewise, in *Freedom* and *Purity*, Franzen declares the virtues of a sobriety that his characters mostly lack; instead, they direct their indignation at one supposed villain after another until they realize, as we are told, the futility of their desire to improve either themselves or the world—and with that, the story ends.

Tom and Leila in *Purity* may represent Franzen's best attempt to characterize an engagement with political problems that is not entirely reducible to the desire to escape personal dilemmas. But neither in his fiction nor in Franzen's personal narrative do we find an example of how the political might positively inform, or transform, the personal, or of how the personal and the political might exist in productive tension. What we find instead are cautionary tales about characters who carom from one extreme to the other, and whose idealism is revealed to have stemmed from unresolved issues in their childhoods or past relationships. The unhappy family, that is, lies not only at the heart of Franzen's novels, but also at the heart of his politics. “The personal is political” seems to mean to him not, as it has for generations of feminists and other activists, that personal decisions and relationships are suffused by politics, but rather something like its opposite: that the political is often a projection of, and always a constant threat to, the people and things that really matter to us.

To some portion of Franzen's audience, such a picture of the relationship between the personal and the political will be unrecognizable. Only relatively recently in human history has it been suggested—the idea is often traced back to Hobbes, though it was most memorably articulated by Mill—that the individual ought to enjoy some protected private or personal sphere, free from the interference of government or society. One of the public services performed by a book like *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates's letter to his son about the “visceral experience” of being black in America, or a play like *Angels in America*, Tony Kushner's epic about the LGBTQ community during the height of the AIDS epidemic, is to document the experience of those Americans for whom the right to be left alone remains largely a rumor. For such populations, politics is not a noisy room that can be entered into or retreated from depending on one's mood; it is a fixture of their condition, penetrating transparently into the most intimate aspects of daily life.

The point is not to discredit Franzen's picture, only to gauge its scope. It is true, I think, that the kind of liberal, white, relatively well-off Westerners who populate Franzen's novels are haunted by the idea that their political decisions, including the decision to participate in politics at all, are discretionary. Some of the appeal, and the success, of identity politics over the last 40 years can probably be attributed to its presentation of a set of commitments that appear necessary and personally urgent to the people making them, in contrast to the felt impersonality of the customary issues—such as corporate corruption, environmental conservation, and open government (characters in Franzen's novels have been committed to all three)—so often adopted by urban liberal elites. These elites, among whom I count myself, can choose to fight for the environment on Monday, against wealth inequality on Wednesday, and for nuclear nonproliferation on Friday, but we are generally justified in suspecting that none of it will make much difference to the quality of our weekends. This is, in the first place, as has often been pointed out, a considerable privilege. Franzen's novels attest to the ways in which it can also become a source of guilt, ambivalence, paralysis, or apathy.

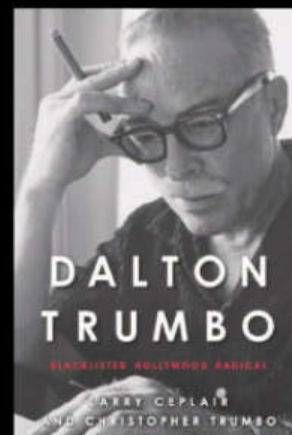
Franzen's most incisive observation regarding the political habits of this demographic is that to take up a cause hesitantly or impersonally is not necessarily to take it up judiciously. More often than not, his work shows the opposite: Political devotion descends on his characters like a fever. But

the temperature of the fever never signals anything about the depth of their commitment; rather, it testifies to the tenacity of the personal problems they are striving to avoid. And the fever eventually always breaks. When Walter, in *Freedom*, becomes obsessed first with strip-mining and later with population control, the reader is ready long before he is for Walter to calm down and return to his troubled suburban marriage. The same can be said for Andreas in *Purity*, whom Leila describes as “a man so full of his own dirty secrets that he sees the entire world as dirty secrets.” Andreas is both more and less self-aware than Walter: more because he is able to recognize that his political project is essentially selfish (“I'm not doing this job because I still believe in it,” he tells Pip. “It's all about me now”), and less because, despite this recognition, he fails to see any but the most tragic options for freeing himself from it.

“The more I wrote novels, the less I trusted my own righteousness,” writes Franzen in *The Kraus Project*. This idea—that novels have a role to play in unsettling our self-certainties, whether personal or political—has always been a foundational one for the Franzen project. Surely, some novels may do that, and some readers may benefit from the lesson that there is another side to every story. By showing how one's ideas come to grief in the crucible of everyday experience, Franzen's brand of realist fiction can facilitate a humility often missing from the rants of cable-news anchors, op-ed columnists, and Twitter crusaders. But what if, for the portion of Franzen's readers that most resemble his characters, the struggle is not in the first place with self-certainty, but rather with how to take committed action in its absence?

There is such a thing as political purism, and it can be the result of our pathological projection onto the world of issues we have failed to resolve in our personal lives. There is also such a thing, I hope, as political conviction: the passionate dedication to a cause bigger than one's messy self or one's unhappy family, undertaken in full appreciation of that cause's complexity and potential futility, and of the fact that nothing can guarantee one's righteousness in pursuing it. Weinstein says the key to the mature Franzen's success has been his capacity to accept what he cannot change. But the problem for liberals today is surely that none of us can know, ahead of time, what it is possible for us to change. For those lucky enough to get to choose our battles, the Franzenesque ricochet between engagement and withdrawal, rage and apathy, is familiar enough. The truly agonizing part, though, begins at just the point where he has always left off. ■

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Matt Damon as Watney in *The Martian*.

Imposture

by **STUART KLAWANS**

I'm not sure if it's true, but the moral imparted at the end of *The Martian* is certainly useful: When in trouble, set to work. "You solve one problem," Matt Damon explains to a classroom of NASA cadets (and by extension, the audience), "and then"—despite the demonstrated likelihood of calamity—"you solve the next."

He ought to know. Damon has spent a lot of time recently fighting for his life far from Earth, sometimes disgracefully (in *Interstellar*) and sometimes with a newfound revolutionary fervor (in *Elysium*), but never with such inventiveness and droll good cheer as in *The Martian*. His character, an astronaut named Watney, might be intended as a slightly futuristic Robinson Crusoe, marooned on the red planet with no resources other than a well-stocked operating base, a scientific education, and the support of Mission Control in Houston; but considering the man's pluckiness, and the movie's amusement in seeing him patch things together, the better comparison might be with Buster Keaton, when he was lost at sea in *The Navigator*.

You may recognize this high-slapstick tradition in the knowing deadpan that Damon expertly maintains, the occasional pratfall that drops a cast member out of the frame, the persistent sense of play (which turns the climax into a game of crack-the-whip high above Mars), and even the film's old-fashioned attitude toward its lead actress. Given little to do in her role as a NASA mission commander, no scripted quirks other than a taste for disco music, and an apparent reluctance to make up

anything on her own, Jessica Chastain might just as well have been credited as "The Girl." For this reason, among others, I can't say *The Martian* improves on Keaton, or even contributes much to his heritage beyond spiffier visual effects (which I'll get to in a moment), but it does belong to an honorable lineage. Nature may erupt with terrifying force (as when a sandstorm on Mars sets off all of Damon's problems), and authority figures labor to seem tough (witness Jeff Daniels, looming in close-up as the sternly befuddled head of NASA), but American pragmatism reliably triumphs, winning out over entropy and seriousness alike.

It's puzzling, though, to see this cinematic vein being mined by Ridley Scott, a filmmaker who tends toward fatalism, cynicism, and a belief that dumb luck is all that saves us from the fangs of a reptilian universe. I wonder what moral could have been taught at the end of his 2013 film, *The Counselor*—all people are utterly depraved, except for Cameron Diaz, who isn't human? Or his 2014 epic, *Exodus: Gods and Kings*—don't believe the Bible? I much prefer the jovial, can-do spirit of *The Martian* to the implicit worldview of *Alien*, *Blade Runner*, or *American Gangster*, but I imagine it comes primarily from the source novel by Andy Weir and the jovial screenplay by Drew Goddard, which Scott, as an old pro, has realized with more craftsmanship than conviction.

Notice, for example, how Scott deploys his visual effects. Like many current blockbusters, *The Martian* doesn't make much use of the 3-D capability with which it's been endowed. It establishes the presence of this feature with a few early blowouts (notably the opening sandstorm on Mars—a good opportunity to fling grit into the audience's face) and then for long stretches forgets about 3-D. So it's telling

that Scott reserves the most prominent depth-of-field effect in this outer-space adventure for a scene of a man sitting at a desk. When Damon, in the operating base, records his log, the computer screen seems to come forward into the moviegoer's space, while the man who is narrating with such jocular composure is pulled away, into a telescoping void. You're literally distanced from the character, while being reminded that you're not really watching a human being but a piece of technology.

This formal choice by Scott, however momentary and minor, is the telltale sign of a more general disregard for the story's emotional possibilities. Consider that Damon has been left for dead by his crewmates, who couldn't wait to leave Mars. (I'm telling you nothing you wouldn't learn from the trailer.) How must he feel about that abandonment? wonders a NASA official. How will the crew feel when they realize what they've done? These are questions you, too, are likely to ask—and the answer given to both, after only a few moments of throat-clearing, is effectively "No problem."

With his authority as both director and producer, Scott might have insisted that the screenplay devote, say, 90 more seconds to the matter—distributed over several scenes, of course, so as not to weigh down the comic tone. Would that have been too much to ask? You might have cared a little more about the fortunes of these characters. You might have felt carried along more strongly by the efforts of a far-flung team to pull together and rescue clever, uncomplaining Matt Damon. But to date, team members in a Ridley Scott film have been less likely to pull together than to be picked off, one by one. For the sake of the current property, Scott has been willing to pretend to care about communal effort—but

you can see his heart isn't in it.

And maybe his insincerity is just blatant enough to add to the laughter of *The Martian*. The liars of the world may be divided into the categories of bad, good, and veteran movie directors. As one of the latter, Scott knows exactly how to fake his way through *The Martian*, giving you a picture that's more genial than suspenseful, more diverting than absorbing, but (thanks especially to Damon) consistently worthy of your good will. I applaud the moral and also Ridley Scott's adherence to it. He put his head down and solved one problem in *The Martian*, and then another.

Veteran filmmakers lie to entertain. Great ones may do it to get at the truth—and for some, such as Jafar Panahi, this strategy of sincere deceit can be nothing less than a necessity. Forbidden to leave Iran, banned from directing, and for a period put under house arrest, Panahi has slipped his chains by pretending to honor the terms of his captivity, making the brilliant, defiantly titled *This Is Not a Film* in his Tehran apartment with simple video cameras, as if he were just taking notes for a future project, and creating the fragmented, self-reflexive *Closed Curtain* inside his beach house, in part under the guise of a picture dreamed up by somebody else.

He may have gotten away with the latter non-film, but its claustrophobic despair and involuted allegory gave me little confidence about Panahi's ability to keep going. I should not have underestimated him. Like a good-natured and resourceful astronaut stranded on Mars, he has now invented a lighter, more outgoing way to work within the law's constraints, while still addressing the inescapable subject of his own condition and that of other dissidents.

Jafar Panahi's Taxi finds the director of *The Circle*, *Crimson Gold*, and *Offside* behind the wheel of a cab, driving around Tehran and picking up people seemingly at random, while a video camera mounted on the dashboard records whatever the passengers have to say. It's a flimsy faux-documentary disguise—as thin in its way as the flat-billed cap and amiable grin with which Panahi has outfitted himself for his new profession. He's a terrible taxi driver, as some of the riders are quick to point out—unsure of directions, unsteady in traffic, and cavalier about collecting his fares—but that's only the start of the situation's obvious anomalies. You also notice that the dashboard camera can somehow cut to different viewpoints. You wonder how the third passenger to stray into the cab knows what the first two said and did. (“They were actors, right, Mr. Panahi? You thought you

could fool me!”) And who is the fast-talking, highly opinionated little girl, about 7 or 8 years old, whom Panahi picks up outside a school? Supposedly, she's his niece—and for all I know, that might be the truth. But can she really be taking a filmmaking class? And, if so, could the teacher have dictated the long set of rules she lispingly reads to Panahi, detailing the faults that must be shunned if an Iranian wants to make a “distributable film”?

One paradox of this imposture, of course, is that while Panahi's *Taxi* does not officially exist in Iran, it has in fact been distributed overseas (it won the top award last February at the Berlin Film Festival) and is now opening theatrically in the United States. The bigger and better paradox is that this deviously contrived picture, which focuses so intently on Panahi himself, should also seem full of life.

No sooner does the car start rolling than an argument erupts—a very plausible one, between the woman in the backseat (a liberal schoolteacher) and the man in front (a swaggering regular-guy conservative, who admits upon exiting that he's a mugger). Other characters who come in and out, in addition to the ostensible niece, are an unctuous dealer in bootleg videos, who wants to pretend he's doing business in partnership with Panahi; a film student who wants Panahi's advice on which movies to see; a bloodied man who is said to have been in an accident; and the victim's sobbing wife, who is either hysterical or an undercover cop scheming to steal Panahi's cellphone. Also on board at different times are a man from Panahi's old neighborhood, who tells a story about being mugged; a young boy who scavenges in dumpsters; a human-rights lawyer with an armful of roses; and two elderly women dressed in folkloric outfits, who need to hurry to an ancient site on the outskirts of the city so they can carry out an inexplicable ritual involving goldfish.

Many of these characters chat knowledgeably about Panahi's earlier films, or even hint at having emerged from them. (The niece points out that she's just like the girl in *The Mirror*; the human-rights lawyer is apparently defending one of the sports-loving women from *Offside*.) It's not difficult, then, to interpret the taxi as Panahi's mental space, where frustrated creative urges and memories mingle with worried political reflections (both “sordidly realistic” and fanciful), and the police threaten to intrude at any time. But despite the pressures that bear down on this little vehicle, and despite the sarcasm implicit in Panahi's supposed change of career, his smile in this picture does not seem entirely fake. I felt he was taking a communicable pleasure in the slyness of *Jafar Panahi's*

Taxi. He's figured out a way to move about in the world even while being confined, and enable the absurdities, outrages, and oddities of daily life to permeate his enforced isolation. It's a onetime solution—but while it lasts, he enjoys it.

Maybe you've seen James Marsh's documentary *Man on Wire*, about the “artistic crime” that Philippe Petit carried out in 1974 by walking a tightrope he had clandestinely rigged between the towers of the World Trade Center. Though arguably marred by reenactments that were not always first-rate, Marsh's film gave you a complex portrait of Petit as both a dreamer and a driven, sometimes callous egotist. You heard from the man himself and from a variety of his former friends and lovers. Best of all, you saw heart-stopping footage of Petit's performance, as recorded by an accomplice on the roof of one of the towers.

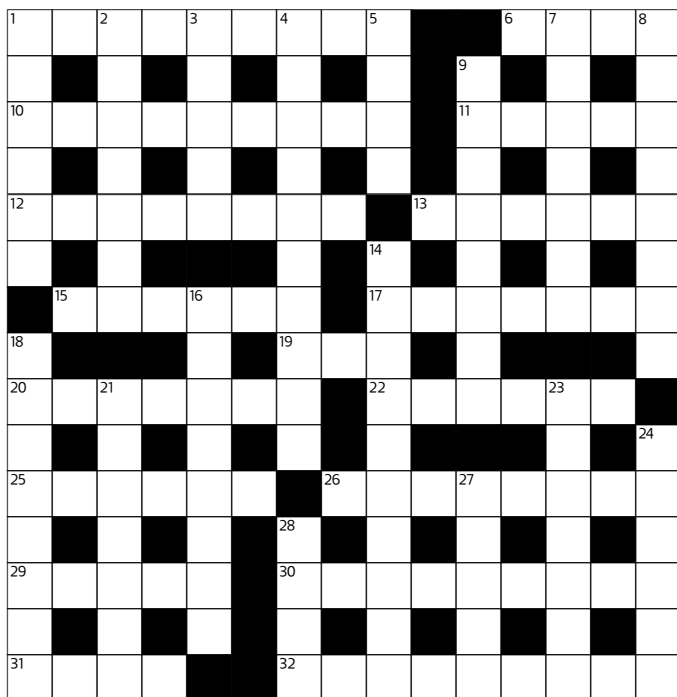
I mention all this to warn you that Robert Zemeckis's feature film about the same incident, *The Walk*, begins with Joseph Gordon-Levitt standing in a CGI imitation of the Statue of Liberty's torch, with a CGI recreation of the Twin Towers gleaming across the harbor. “But why? *Pourquoi?*” Gordon-Levitt asks in his best Franch ox-sent, meanwhile shrugging and popping his eyes and bouncing the air off his palms to indicate uncontainable joie de vivre. “Zat is the question people ask me ze most.” The answer, of course, has something to do with freedom and the pursuit of happiness—but to understand why, one must first go back to that beautiful city, Páree, a few years earlier. Cue le jazz hot.

In fairness to Gordon-Levitt, I have to say his spoken French is more than passable, and his dancer's lightness makes him a physically credible Petit. But there is no exoneration for Zemeckis, who has committed not artistic crimes but crimes against art: filling a script with corn, and reducing Petit to an ooze of oo-la-la cheese. Most inexcusable of all, he has used his digital 3-D to flatter you, creating the illusion that you are out on the wire with Petit, walking between the towers. This is the worst kind of lie—because, as you may learn from the grainy, 8mm images shot some 40 years ago, few of us would have dared step to the roof's edge and look down.

The Walk has gone into release after providing the 2015 New York Film Festival with an underwhelming opening-night feature. Fortunately, many other films are in the festival. By the time I write about some of them in the next column, I expect *The Walk*, unlike Petit's boldly imaginative act, will already be fading from memory. ■

Puzzle No. 3376

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO



ACROSS

- 1 Clip each part of a bag (barely open)—attire for a guide (9)
- 6 A fool in a hurry (4)
- 10 Examining plunder that holds ruler agog at first (7,2)
- 11 Willow is more pink after losing its top (5)
- 12 Native American is bashful with Frank, we hear (8)
- 13 Pass the crackers, please (6)
- 15 Child's spoken instruction to the janitor? (6)
- 17 Stores freestyle poem and retro tune (7)
- 19 Dostoevsky conceals one of the three-letter 32 that appear in the diagram—there are nine others (3)
- 20 First lady protects corrupt clan in Chinatown, for instance (7)
- 22 Liverpool letter about a piece of software put in a microwave...(6)
- 25 ...is bigoted, sending the leader to the back (6)
- 26 Pair of gullible fellows getting into cunning dispute (8)
- 29 Playwright is taken by local beer (5)
- 30 After a terrible time of life, consumer gets a sports car, perhaps (3-6)

- 31 Whirlpool taking the top off negligee (4)
- 32 Excruciatingly bad story involving the origin of pipe organs (4,5)

DOWN

- 1 Choose, with or without a primary (6)
- 2 Ocelots wandering nigh (5,2)
- 3 Extract liquid from frozen water under Juneau's outskirts (5)
- 4 Small vehicles with a measure of power, having departed east and south (10)
- 5 Biblical book's truths, avoiding false start (4)
- 7 Carrier beginning to seem more trendy (7)
- 8 Average names? Unacceptable for cheese (8)
- 9 Idle drink ensnares one sucker (8)
- 14 Wow! Zoo herd tamed in old age (10)
- 16 Careless repartee reveals where a Christmas present might be found? (4,4)
- 18 Banish broken reel upon opening (8)
- 21 Stole furniture in which a baby and its parents sleep? (7)
- 23 Someone who builds before military training program escalates (7)
- 24 Reverses receptacles for Mormon cremains? (1-5)
- 27 Exhaust United States and European Union source of petroleum (3,2)
- 28 Try Sunday paper (4)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3375

ACROSS 1 LACE + RATED 6 CUP
ID 9 ABE + TS 10 anag. 11 HO(ME +
MAD)E 12 Q + ATARI 14 3 defs.
15 CREE(PINES)S 18 anag.
19 2 defs. 22 anag. (&lit.) 24 [b]AC A
DEMA (rev.) 26 A + FRI(KAN)ER
27 BU(IL)T 28 anag.
29 PA(SSEN)GER (Ness rev.)

DOWN 1 LO + ACHES 2 anag.
3 RE-SUM + E 4 TH(UNDER)OU +
S 5 rev. hidden 6 CAN + NAB + IS 7
hidden 8 DAH + LIAS (rev.)
13 "pea score" 16 anag. 17 COW +
[p]ORKER 18 OR + CHARD
20 TR + ACTOR 21 anag.
23 PER + ON (rev.) 25 rev.



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MINDING THE GAP

In recent decades, CEO compensation has been viewed solely through the lens of shareholder value. This has been a mistake. This perspective has not curbed irresponsible risk-taking or the phenomenal growth of pay packages, and may in fact have encouraged these excesses. We believe that a pay package can be so large as to distort decision-making and isolate a CEO from the rest of the corporation. If CEOs are paid to lead an organization and drive long-term value creation, their compensation should be aligned with the interests of the corporation as a whole.



The Dodd Frank Act, passed in the wake of the financial crisis, may have a partial answer to this problem. On August 5, 2015, the Securities and Exchange Commission issued a rule that will require publicly traded corporations to report the ratio between the CEO's compensation and the compensation paid to the median employee.

Ultimately, this relatively simple metric could impact millions of employees around the world, with multiplier effects throughout the economy, if companies seek to reduce the ratio by raising wages. At the same time that we have witnessed the steady growth

of CEO compensation, wages have stagnated. To cite one report from the Economic Policy Institute, wage growth for most workers has been weak for virtually the entire period since 1979, and "between 2002 and 2012, wages were stagnant or declined for the entire bottom 70 percent of the wage distribution." These trends are unsustainable. Wage stagnation has fueled our nation's debt burden, and contributed to the financial crisis. Investors ignore this at their peril. How are corporate compensation decisions related to this larger macroeconomic problem? The pay ratio disclosures will help us to answer that question.

At Domini, we seek to understand each company's true value proposition for investors and for society at large. We believe that the pay ratio disclosure will serve as an important indicator of quality management. Companies with lower ratios should benefit in the long-term from more loyal and productive employees and a CEO less focused on short-term stock price movements. A CEO that favors narrowing the gap between her compensation and the median employee may be a leader with a better understanding of the sources of value and innovation at her company. A particularly high ratio may justify a vote against the members of the compensation committee. A particularly low ratio may justify higher CEO compensation than we would ordinarily accept. This figure should also serve as a catalyst for particularly interesting and constructive conversations with management.

In *What Publicity Can Do* (1913), Louis Brandeis wrote that "publicity is justly commended as a remedy for social and industrial diseases. Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants; electric light the most efficient policeman." Brandeis reasoned that investors will make better decisions if they have relevant information, and their informed decision making will serve as a check on undesirable behavior. He argued that these disclosures can put an end to "unjustly acquired wealth." We view the pay ratio disclosure as a classic "Brandeis indicator"—a figure that once brought to the light of day will operate as a remedial measure.

Will CEOs wish to compete to see who benefits from the most inequitable compensation structure? We will soon find out. Our guess is that they will not.

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THE Nation.

DIGITAL Magazine

Eric Alterman The Games Journalists Play

It's no exaggeration to say that John Heilemann and Mark Halperin's *Game Change* proved to be one of those brief, earthshaking events in "the village" that are the story itself they're—almost immediately—replayed by another one. In this case, its replacement was a genuine earthquake in Haiti and a metaphorical one in Washington: a tsunami of the authors' unparalleled access to the 2008 presidential race's major players, and their willingness to offer

blatant anonymity to those willing to spill, they included an extraordinary rare commodity: a book that says as it says, a story that suffers not at all from the reader's full knowledge of how it all turns out.

Phenomena such as *Game Change's* publication are often more interesting for what they show about the community that permits them than for the actual information they contain. In most recent

examples, as Heidi Herzberg noted in *The New York Times*, "one based on what may be fairly called gossip." It is packed with score-keeping, back-scratching, momentary displays of profanity by its principals, and occasionally impressive bits of mind-reading by its authors.

As Charles Pierce pointed out in his "Slacker Friday" appearance on my "Altercation" blog, what these men are in essence doing is a very old game: the game of insider journalism.

Just before the book was published, as its spin machine was fulling out its gears, *The Atlantic's* Marc Ambler offered this assessment: "Political scientists aren't going to like this book, because it portrays politics as it is actually lived by the candidates, their staffs and the press, which is to say—a messy, murky, night-

vision competition between Barack Obama's campaign and the rest of the world."

Challenged precisely, Ambler's remark is a splendid example of the liberal political science establishment's petulance. Even so, he was surely going to say what most political scientists and practitioners believe. (*The New York Times Magazine's* Man for made a similarly scolding non-academic statement in a review published in the journal *Democracy* last year.)

A second institutional revelation of *Game Change* is the small degree to which political scientists and journalists are so

Edwards and the non-scientist also of Elizabeth Edwards, it is that everything we were told during the campaign about this couple was a lie. It doesn't really matter much in terms of whether he would have made a good president, but given how much ink is spilled on the "character" issues of candidates and their spouses, it is significant that virtually everything written about the Edwardses when it mattered least reality. Can this really be true in every case who covered the 2008 and 2009 campaign?

The authors also devote considerable space to a column early in the campaign in which Hollywood mogul David Geffen made a

very common claim: Bill and Hillary Clinton in Marmara Dowl before toasting an Obama fundraiser. Like David, the *Game*

Change authors ignore Geffen's "world-class" (a Bushen-bergs, de Koonings, Pollocks, Garbys, a Jasper Johns target, a

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Villagers and human rights officials accuse the United States military of torturing suspects in hidden detention centers.

On a quiet, wintry night last year in the eastern Afghan town of Khost, a young government employee named Jamshid Singh was arrested. He had been seen in the town's bazaar with a group of friends. Family members scoured Khost's dusty streets for days. Village elders contacted Taliban commanders in the area who were in village government workers, but they had never heard of the young man. Even the governor got involved, ordering his police to search for the missing man.

But the hunt started up nothing. Spring and summer came and went with no sign of Jamshid. Then one day, long after the police and village elders had abandoned their search, a man delivered a note from Jamshid to his family. In it, Jamshid informed them that he was in Bagram, an American prison more than 100 miles west. US forces had picked him up while he was on his way home from the bazaar, the note later stated, and he didn't know when he would be freed.

In the past few years, Afghan villages in Afghanistan's rugged heartland have begun to lose faith in the American project. Many of them can point to the precise moment of this transformation, and it usually took place in the dead of night, when the growing Taliban insurgency and Al Qaeda, the US military has been arresting suspects and sending them to one of a number of secret detention sites on military bases, often on the highest suspicion and without the knowledge of their families. Those

right now have become prisoners of war, often in hidden detention centers.

One Dark Night in 1

November 18, 2001, was one of a dark night in the history of the United States. It was the day that the World Trade Center was hit by a plane, and the Pentagon was hit by a plane.

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